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L I F E

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C H A U C E R.

THE

OR

CHAUCEY



P. Coudé Sculp.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER,
*From an Original Painting
in the Picture Gallery at Oxford.*

Published Feb. 14, 1804, by Richard Phillips, N^o 71, S^t Pauls Church Yard, London.

L I F E
OF
GEOFFREY CHAUCER,
THE EARLY ENGLISH POET:
INCLUDING
MEMOIRS OF HIS NEAR FRIEND AND KINSMAN,
JOHN OF GAUNT, DUKE OF LANCASTER:
WITH SKETCHES OF THE
MANNERS, OPINIONS, ARTS AND LITERATURE
OF ENGLAND
IN
THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

BY WILLIAM GODWIN.

Come like shadows; so depart!

SHAKESPEAR.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY T. DAVISON, WHITE-FRIARS;
FOR RICHARD PHILLIPS, N^o. 71, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

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PREFACE.

§. I.

THE two names which perhaps do the greatest honour to the annals of English literature, are those of Chaucer and of Shakespear. Shakespear we have long and justly been accustomed to regard as the first in the catalogue of poetical and creative minds; and after the dramas of Shakespear, there is no production of man that displays more various and vigorous talent than the Canterbury Tales. Splendour of narrative, richness of fancy, pathetic simplicity of incident and feel-

ing, a powerful style in delineating character and manners, and an animated vein of comic humour, each takes its turn in this wonderful performance, and each in turn appears to be that in which the author was most qualified to excel.

There is one respect at least in which the works of Chaucer are better fitted to excite our astonishment than those of Shakespear. Ordinary readers are inclined to regard the times of Shakespear as barbarous, because they are remote. But in reality the age of queen Elizabeth was a period of uncommon refinement. We have since that time enlarged our theatres ; we have made some improvements in the mechanism of dramatical exhibition ; and we have studied, with advantage or otherwise, the laws of the Grecian stage. But we have never produced any thing that will enter into comparison with the plays

of Shakespear, or even of some of his contemporaries. What age can be less barbarous than that which, beside the dramatic productions of Shakespear^a, Fletcher, Massinger and Jonson, is illustrated with the names of Raleigh, of Hooker, of Bacon, and of Spenser?

But the times of Chaucer were in a much more obvious and unquestionable sense, so far as poetry is concerned, times of barbarism. The history of the revival of literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries will be treated in these volumes. The sole efforts in the art of verse which had been made in Western Europe pre-

^a A frivolous dispute has been raised respecting the proper way of spelling the name of our great dramatic poet. His own orthography in this point seems to have been unsettled. Perhaps, when the etymology of a proper name is obvious, it becomes right in us to supersede the fancy of the individual, and to follow a less capricious and more infallible guide.

viously to Chaucer, were romances of prodigious and supernatural adventure, prolix volumes of unvaried allegory, and the rhapsodies of the vagrant minstrel. These productions, though not unrelieved by admirable flights of imagination, were for the most part rugged in versification, prosaic in language, and diffusive and rambling in their story and conduct. What had been achieved in English, was little better than a jejune table of events with the addition of rhyme. Chaucer fixed and naturalised the genuine art of poetry in our island. But what is most memorable in his eulogy, is that he is the father of our language, the idiom of which was by the Norman conquest banished from courts and civilised life, and which Chaucer was the first to restore to literature, and the muses. No one man in the history of human intellect ever did

PREFACE.

more, than was effected by the single mind of Chaucer.

These are abundant reasons why Englishmen should regard Chaucer with peculiar veneration, should cherish his memory, and eagerly desire to be acquainted with whatever may illustrate his character, or explain the wonders he performed. The first and direct object of this work, is to erect a monument to his name, and, as far as the writer was capable of doing it, to produce an interesting and amusing book in modern English, enabling the reader, who might shrink from the labour of mastering the phraseology of Chaucer, to do justice to his illustrious countryman. It seemed probable also that, if the author were successful in making a popular work, many might by its means be induced to study the language of our ancestors, and the elements

and history of our vernacular speech; a study at least as improving as that of the language of Greece and Rome.

A further idea, which was continually present to the mind of the author while writing, obviously contributed to give animation to his labours, and importance to his undertaking. The full and complete life of a poet would include an extensive survey of the manners, the opinions, the arts and the literature, of the age in which the poet lived. This is the only way in which we can become truly acquainted with the history of his mind, and the causes which made him what he was. We must observe what Chaucer felt and saw, how he was educated, what species of learning he pursued, and what were the objects, the events and the persons, successively presented to his view, before we can strictly and philosophically under-

stand his biography. To delineate the state of England, such as Chaucer saw it, in every point of view in which it can be delineated, is the subject of this book,

But, while engaged in this study, the reader may expect to gain an additional advantage, beside that of understanding the poet. If the knowledge of contemporary objects is the biography of Chaucer, the converse of the proposition will also be true, and the biography of Chaucer will be the picture of a certain portion of the literary, political and domestic history of our country. The person of Chaucer may in this view be considered as the central figure in a miscellaneous painting, giving unity and individual application to the otherwise disjointed particulars with which the canvas is diversified. No man of moral sentiment or of taste will affirm, that a more becoming

central figure to the delineation of England in the fourteenth century can be found, than the Englishman who gives name to these volumes,

§. II.

I CAN pretend only to have written a superficial work. My studies, if any thing of mine deserves so serious a name, have chiefly been engaged upon other subjects; and I came in a manner a novice to the present undertaking. Had the circumstances under which I have written been different, I should have been anxious to investigate to the bottom the various topics of which I have treated,

Perhaps however I have not wholly failed in the execution of my design. I was desirous of convincing my countrymen that there existed mines of instruction

and delight, with which they had hitherto little acquaintance. I have led my readers, with however unconfirmed a speech and inadequate powers, to the different sources of information ; and, if I have been unable to present what should satisfy a vigorous and earnest curiosity, I have wished to say enough to awaken their enquiries, and communicate to them some image of men and times which have long since been no more.

It was my purpose to produce a work of a new species. Antiquities have too generally been regarded as the province of men of cold tempers and sterile imaginations, writers who, by their phlegmatic and desultory industry, have brought discredit upon a science, which is perhaps beyond all others fraught with wisdom, moral instruction and intellectual improvement. Their books may indeed be con-

siderably useful to the patient enquirer who would delineate the picture of past times for himself; but they can scarcely incite enquiry; and their contents are put together with such narrow views, so total an absence of discrimination, and such an unsuspecting ignorance of the materials of which man is made, that the perusal of them tends for the most part to stupify the sense, and to imbue the soul with moping and lifeless dejection.

It was my wish, had my power held equal pace with my strong inclination, to carry the workings of fancy and the spirit of philosophy into the investigation of ages past. I was anxious to rescue for a moment the illustrious dead from the jaws of the grave, to make them pass in review before me, to question their spirits and record their answers. I wished to make myself their master of the ceremonies, to

introduce my reader to their familiar speech, and to enable him to feel for the instant as if he had lived with Chaucer,

§. III.

I HAVE acknowledged the slightness of the present work, in comparison of the magnitude of its subject. It has been my good fortune however, in the course of my undertaking, to encounter many discoveries. Mr. Tyrwhit, to whom we are indebted for the latest and best edition of the Canterbury Tales, informs us, that he “ had once the intention of writing a formal life of Chaucer ; but that, after a reasonable waste of time and pains in searching for materials, he found that he could do nothing better, than add to his Preface a short Abstract of the Historical

Passages of that Life^b;" which, together with the comments of its compiler, fills only about eight quarto pages. A late antiquarian has given his approbation to what Mr. Tyrwhit has done in this respect^c.

The fact is however, that this editor made no exertions as to the history of the poet, but contented himself with examining what other biographers had related, and adding a few memorandums taken from Rymer's manuscript collections, now in the British Museum. He has not in a single instance resorted to the national repositories in which our records are preserved. In this sort of labour

^b Edition of the Canterbury Tales, Preface.

^c Ellis, Specimens of the Early English Poets, Vol. I, Chap. VIII.

I had been indefatigable; and I have many obligations to acknowledge to the politeness and liberality of the persons to whose custody these monuments are confided. I encountered indeed no obstacle, wherever I had occasion to direct my enquiries among the different offices of government. After all my diligence however, I am by no means confident that I may not have left some particulars to be gleaned by the compilers who shall come after me.

The attentive reader will perceive that I have been less copious upon the last fifteen, than upon the preceding years of the life of Chaucer. I had advanced as far as the middle of the second volume, when I saw my materials growing under my hand, and became sensible that, if they were fully treated, the work would extend beyond the dimensions originally pre-

scribed to it. But, if I, enamoured of my subject, might have thought no number of pages or of volumes too much for its developement, it was by no means impossible that purchasers and readers would think otherwise. My bookseller, who is professionally conversant with matters of this sort, assured me, that two volumes in quarto were as much as the public would allow the title of my book to authorise. It would be in vain to produce a work, whatever information it might comprise, which no one will purchase or will read; and I have therefore submitted to his decision. In fact, less is perhaps lost by this compression, than at first I was apt to imagine. It had been my object to collect generally those particulars of contemporary manners, literature and story, which contributed to make Chaucer what he was: But the

ample survey of what occurred before he was fifty-seven years of age, may seem sufficient for this purpose; nor is it likely that his mind underwent any essential revolution after that period. I found John of Gaunt intimately connected with the history of Chaucer, and I was desirous of showing what sort of man Chaucer had for his patron and his friend: But, if I have not adequately rescued this prince from the misrepresentations of the crowd of historians in what the reader will find in these volumes, I am afraid it would be to little purpose to have laboured upon the concluding period of his life. I have been constrained to omit the analysis of Chaucer's last productions, his Canterbury Tales, and the endeavour to trace the descent of these tales through preceding and contemporary authors: But this part of his works has already been most studied

and illustrated; and the edition of Mr. Tyrwhit, though the production of such an antiquary as has above been described, has enough of judgment and knowledge to form some excuse for the writer who declines to recommment on the same work.

The Appendix to these volumes principally consists of extracts from the records preserved in the Tower of London and in other public repositories. In a work so copious as the present, it seemed proper to give these documents at length. One reader, in perusing, will often find hints and topics for conjecture and reflection, which may escape the observation of another. They are here given immediately from the originals; and, if errors shall be found in them, I have no excuse to plead, unless the hurry and distraction incident to a transcript to be made in a public office. The only document here given,

of which, for reasons not necessary to be mentioned, I was unable to obtain a sight, is the Testimony of Chaucer in the cause of Scrope and Grosvenor, printed at the end of the first volume, and which forms the subject of a Dissertation prefixed to that volume.—It is perhaps worthy of notice that, though the secretary of the Society of Antiquaries obligingly favoured me with a copy of Chaucer's Lease (Appendix, No. XXVIII) from a plate, engraved by Dr. Richard Rawlinson, and deposited in the Library of the Society, he at the same time informed me that I could not be permitted to see the engraving. The copy however was so far of use, as it led me to the original in the archives of the dean and chapter of Westminster, whence (a small number of errors excepted, which are here corrected) Dr. Rawlinson's plate was taken.

Throughout this publication, care has been taken to make no reference to any book, which has not been actually consulted, and the reference verified by inspection. One circumstance has resulted from this, which it seems candid to explain. In the early part of the work, for about one hundred pages, the books referred to are few, and many references are given at second-hand from publications comparatively accessible or modern; afterward this defect no longer occurs. The cause of this is as follows. It was impossible for me to purchase all the books I had occasion to consult; and, reasoning upon general principles, I believed it could not be difficult in such a metropolis as London to obtain the loan of them. I accordingly made many efforts for that purpose; but my efforts were for the most part unsuccessful. Few of our public

libraries suffer their books to be removed beyond the walls of their institution. And, for private collectors, I generally found that they did not see, in the illustrations of English history and English literature here proposed to be made, a sufficient motive to part with their treasures for a short time out of their own hands. After some interval therefore of fruitless experiments, it became necessary to form a peremptory resolution, and to yield to an assiduous and almost daily attendance at the British Museum. This has been productive of great loss of time and many disadvantages. No studious man can collate authorities and draw his inferences satisfactorily, except in his own chamber. No man can adequately judge what it is that may be necessary to his purpose, till after repeated essays and comparisons. Add to which, he who studies at home

chooses his seasons of study, while he who resorts to a public library has them measured out to him by others. But, when animated with the hope of adding something to the stock of general information or improvement, it is right that such obstacles should be regarded by us as unworthy of notice.

October, 1803.

DISSERTATION

UPON THE

PERIOD OF THE BIRTH OF CHAUCER.

THE dates assigned to the birth and death of Chaucer are among those points which, from the time perhaps of the erecting his tomb in 1556 to the present, have never been questioned or disturbed. It is undoubtedly pleasing, in a subject which in many particulars is involved in obscurity, to be able to seize some points which are free from the shadow of a doubt. It has however fallen to the lot of the writer of these volumes to discover a document, which is calculated in its consequences to bring the former of these dates into question.

The path which led to this document was as follows. In the Life of Chaucer prefixed to Urry's edition of his works, is this remark. "It may not be improper to observe, that during Chaucer's troubles, in the tenth year of Rich. II. there was a dispute in a case of chivalry depending between sir Richard Grosvenour and sir Richard le Scrope, concerning their arms; which the king directed John Staple and Walter Leycester heralds, to examine. They accordingly met at the Preaching Fryers in London, on Monday the last day of May, where appeared as witnesses most of the chief nobility in England, and other persons of distinction; among whom was our Chaucer, who gave in evidence, "that he saw Scrope armed at Rottes in France, *azure* with a bend *d'or*, and that coat was by public voice and fame taken for Scrope's coat." The author of the Life refers, as his authority for this statement, to a "roll in a cause of chivalry between Scrope and Grosvenour, 10 R. 2. communicated to Mr. Urry by John Anstis Esq; Garter Principal King at Arms."

I felt extremely desirous to see the original, or an authenticated copy, of Chaucer's deposition here referred to. Beside the obvious wish, which must exist in every inquisitive mind, to inspect for himself the documents upon which his narrative is to be founded, I was not without hope that, in the deposition at large, would be mentioned the date of the fact related to have happened at Rottes, and perhaps other circumstances and particulars connected with the transaction. In France there are several places dispersed, of this or a similar name; and, if the geography were exactly ascertained in the deposition, it might lead to a conjecture as to the campaign in which Chaucer was engaged, and the actions in which he figured: nor would it be easy to decide beforehand, how many parts of his biography this information might serve to elucidate.

The person to whom I first stated my desire to examine this document, was Francis Townsend esquire, Windsor Herald in his Majesty's College of Arms; and, though I was an entire stranger, he with great liber-

ality undertook to procure, and soon after transmitted to me, a copy.

I did not find, in the deposition of Chaucer, the particulars I looked for, but I found something that I did not look for; and this was a new hypothesis respecting the period of Chaucer's birth.

In the commencement of the deposition (which is given entire in the appendix to this volume), Chaucer is stated to be "of the age of forty years and upward, and to have borne arms twenty-seven years." This was not a little surprising. The usual date assigned to the birth of Chaucer is 1328. The deposition is dated 12 October 1386; at which time, if the received chronology of his life is right, he ought to have been, not forty, but fifty-eight, years of age.

Proceeding upon the authority of Chaucer's deposition, we might suppose that he was born about the year 1344. And, having fixed this date, there are other circumstances which offer themselves, tending to confirm this idea.

There is a sufficient correspondence be-

tween the period assigned in the deposition, for Chaucer's having first borne arms, and the period of his birth. Construing forty years old and upward, to mean forty-two, for example, this will bring the period of his first bearing arms to the fifteenth or sixteenth year of his age.

But, beside the internal concordance of the parts of the deposition, there are certain independent particulars, which may appear favourable to the inference it seems to authorise.

The first appearance of the name of Chaucer in our official records, is in the year 1367. In this document^a Chaucer is styled *dilectus valettus noster*; the purpose of the grant being to secure to him a pension of twenty marks *per annum*, "in consideration of the good service which he had rendered, and should render, to his sovereign."

The term *valettus* is defined by Du-

^a Appendix, No. V.

cange^b to mean “*magnatis filius, qui necdum militare cingulum erat consecutus*; the son of a person of rank, who had not yet put on the arms of a soldier.” This appellation therefore may be thought better to accord with the age of twenty-three, at which Chaucer would have arrived on the present supposition, than with that of thirty-nine, which was his age at this period according to the received chronology.

Mr. Townsend likewise, through whose kindness I received the copy of this deposition, and who is eminently distinguished for the sagacity and accuracy of his researches, pointed out a gradation of appellations in the successive grants to Chaucer, three different ones in succession, which he conceived to agree best with the later date for the period of his birth. In the year 1367, he is called in the official records *valettus*; in the year

^b Glossarium Mediæ et Infimæ Latinitatis, in voc. Valeti.

1372, *scutifer*^c; and in the year 1374^d, and all subsequent examples, *armiger*.

Notwithstanding the direct evidence of Chaucer's deposition, and the corroborating circumstances here specified, I am inclined to adhere to the old chronology as exhibiting the true date of Chaucer's birth.

The argument derived from the use of the terms *valettus* and *scutifer*, is entitled to no great weight in the present case.

In the first place, it implies on the face of it a contradiction. *Valettus*, the appellation applied to Chaucer in 1367, in the strict sense of the term implies a person "who had not yet put on the arms of a soldier." But Chaucer informs us in this very deposition, that, in 1386, he had already borne arms twenty-seven years, that is, ever since the year 1359.

As to the gradation of appellations applied to Chaucer in different years of his life, it

^c Appendix, No. VI.

^d Ditto, No. VII.

may be worth our while to be a little more particular.

St. Palaye, in his Memoirs on Ancient Chivalry^c, states three degrees through which a young person, intended for the military profession ordinarily passed. He was first a page, secondly, an esquire, and lastly, a knight. Into the first of these conditions he ordinarily entered at the age of seven, and into the second at the age of fourteen. It is to the first of these that the term *valettus* strictly applies. If therefore we were to take the patent of 1367 in the utmost severity of construction, we should infer that Chaucer was at that period between the seventh and the fourteenth years of his age.

Perhaps there was a time in the history of chivalry, when the term *valettus* was constantly employed in all this strictness of construction. But, as the rigour of the system of chivalry declined, this and the correspond-

^c Tom. I, Partie I.

ing terms were employed in a looser and less definite sense.

The idea of causing a young person to pass through the three stages of page, esquire and knight, upon the last of which he entered as soon as he had arrived at the age of maturity, was probably never applied to any but persons of noble birth. As soon as the doctrine of nobility became in some degree relaxed, the terms of page and esquire, or their Latin synonymes *valettus* and *armiger*, were no longer confined to persons of rank; and it was deemed sufficient that the appellation of knight was received as the symbol of nobility in him who bore it. It is in this relaxed sense that Chaucer, and even his son Thomas, speaker of the house of commons, bore no higher style than that of *armiger* to the latest period of their lives.

This perhaps sufficiently proves, in addition to a thousand arguments to the same purpose, that Chaucer was not, as Leland supposed him to be^f, *nobili loco natus*, "a person of elevated

^f *Scriptores Britannici*, cap. dv.

birth." The style *armiger* as applied to persons of subordinate rank, no longer conveyed more than an imperfect image of its original signification, and implied that the person who bore it was considered as of no less distinction than a young scyon of nobility between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one years. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the term *valettus* was used with the same laxness of construction, and was understood to signify that the person to whom it was applied was considered as of no less distinction than a young scyon of nobility between the ages of seven and fourteen years. In the primitive sense the appellation could by no means apply to Chaucer at the age of twenty-three; in the new and degenerate sense it might apply to him, for aught that appears to the contrary, at the age of thirty-nine.

In the relaxed sense of the word *armiger*, it was applicable, as we have seen in the case of the Chaucers, father and son, and as is the present practice throughout the British empire, to a certain description of persons during the whole of their lives; and could

no otherwise be exchanged in them for a higher style, than by the symbols of ennoblement communicated to them from the sovereign, the fountain of honour. In the same period of time it is extremely probable that the word *valettus* was in like manner the designation of a particular rank, inferior to that of *armiger*. Ducange^s observes that the term *vassalus* is to be taken as the equivalent of *miles* or knight, and that *valettus* is to be construed *quasi vassalettus*, as the diminutive of *vassalus*, a little, or half, knight. It may perhaps therefore be regarded as answering to the more modern term gentleman, which in formal and accurate writing, appears to express a rank between that of yeoman and of esquire. The additions of esquire and gentleman were not brought into ordinary use, but in consequence of the act, 1 Hen. 5, requiring that in indictments and other processes the party should be described with his regular addition.

* ubi supra.

Taking for granted the truth of this explanation, it seems not improbable that it was Chaucer's employment of envoy to the duke of Genoa, that raised him by its operation from the rank of *valettus*, in which he might otherwise have remained for the whole course of his life.

The terms *scutifer* and *armiger* have, I believe, always been understood as strictly synonymous; and answering to the English term esquire. In their exact sense they imply the favourite and principal attendant on a knight, whose office was to follow him, bearing occasionally his shield and other pieces of his arms.

But, though any argument to be derived from the additions by which Chaucer is designated in the records may be exceedingly fallacious, it seems difficult to set aside his own authority in the deposition, where he expressly states his age to be little more than forty years. I confess that I am not able satisfactorily to explain this circumstance.

It occurred to me that the age to be mentioned in a deposition of this sort did not

demand any particular accuracy, and that all that was requisite was that the deponent should be of an age sufficient to make him a credible witness to the fact he reported. Chaucer spoke in this instance of a fact which had happened twenty-seven years before, and therefore it was necessary that, at the time he reported it, he should be forty years old and upward.

I conceived it probable that, in an affair of this sort, though the deposition bore the form of being delivered, orally or in writing, by the deponent, the words were supplied to him by his lawyer, or by some officer of the court, before which his evidence was delivered: questions were proposed to him, his answers taken down, and the whole afterward digested into the form of a regular narrative. This would in some degree account for an erroneous statement of Chaucer's age in the present instance: the proper officer putting to him the question, "Are you forty years old and upward?" in other words, "Are you of an age to be a credible witness to

the fact you assert?" and Chaucer barely returning the expected answer, "I am."—As there are no courts of chivalry at this time existing, I enquired into the mode of proceeding in our ecclesiastical courts, where, as in the present case, the testimony of witnesses is always delivered in writing. Here I found my conjecture partly confirmed, as to the fact of the testimonies being first taken in question and answer, and afterward reduced into narrative: but I did not find, that the questions ordinarily proposed were so full and circumstantial in their tenour, supplying to the witness the very words of his answer, as my supposition might seem to require.

It struck me that "forty years old" was a round number, and on that account might be construed as bearing on the face of it a certain presumption of inaccuracy. To illustrate this idea, I compared Chaucer's deposition with the depositions of the other witnesses in the same cause: but here also I obtained a very imperfect satisfaction; some of the witnesses

stating their age in round numbers, some with a greater appearance of minuteness, and some stating no age.

Lastly, we may conceive that such an understatement of Chaucer's age as it is my purpose to establish, might be dictated to him by a sentiment of vanity. Chaucer, with all his wonderful endowments, was a man ; and it is incident to perhaps one half of mankind, particularly of that part of our species who are accustomed to associate with the opulent and refined, when advanced beyond the middle period of human life, to be willing to be thought younger than they are. Chaucer was a courtier ; and was not without some contagion of the folly of courtiers. Though now an old man, and, as we shall hereafter see, a prisoner, embarrassed in his circumstances, and not without some reasons to fear for his life, he felt like an antiquated belle, and did not see why, when it was of no importance to the substance of his testimony, he should confess that he had passed his eighth climacteric.

It is for the reader to judge respecting the force of these conjectures ; all that is further incumbent upon me is to produce the arguments which operate in contradiction to the testimony in question.

The testimony I have to oppose is no less than the assertion of Chaucer himself : the substance of the evidence on the other side is of the same description ; it is Chaucer against Chaucer.

Two of the most considerable poems of our author, after the Canterbury Tales, and the Troilus and Creseide, are entitled the Parliament of Birds, and Chaucer's Dream. These have almost universally been held, and will be proved in the course of this work, to be written respectively on occasion of the courtship and the marriage of John of Gaunt and the princess Blanche ; that is, in the years 1358 and 1359. But Chaucer was at that time, according to the date of his birth inferred from his deposition, only fourteen and fifteen years old. This is almost equally incredible, whether we judge from the merit

and language of these poems, or from the particulars to which they relate. Chaucer could not at so early an age have formed the admirable plan of redeeming the English language from the disgrace and neglect into which it had long fallen ; nor is it to be believed that at such an age he would have been made the select and confidential friend of John of Gaunt, which these poems show him to have been at this time. They bear no marks of crude and juvenile composition ; but, in ideas, in versification, and in every thing which belongs to a just poem, are evidently the fruit of an accomplished and consummate mind. Thus far we oppose Chaucer to himself. But there are other arguments which may be adduced.

The supposition that Chaucer was born so late as the year 1344, would totally overturn all the received statements of all the biographers respecting his education at Cambridge, at Oxford, and at Paris. He would dwindle into a mere court-page ; having written verses for his patron at the age of fourteen and fifteen, and at the latter of these

years having accompanied his masters to the field of battle as a soldier.

Leland, in his *Lives of the British Writers*, affirms that "Chaucer lived to the period of grey hairs, and at length found old age his greatest disease." This could not be true in the established meaning of such phrases, if he was born in the year 1344, and died at the age of fifty-six. There are many errors in Leland's biography of Chaucer; but it is unjust to infer that there are no truths. In this point of Chaucer's advanced age, what he says must be considered as the report of an antiquarian living in the early part of the sixteenth century, respecting what was ordinarily rumoured on the subject.

But we can add to the testimony of Leland, the much higher authority of a contemporary and a personal friend of Chaucer. Gower, in his *De Confessione Amantis*, which is stated in the body of the work to have been produced in the sixteenth year of Richard II. (1392|3), thus expresses himself, speaking of his friend:

^h For thy, nowe *in his dayés olde*,
Thou shalt hym tellen this message,
That he, *upon his latter age*,
To sette an ende of all his werke,
Do make his Testament of Love.

Book VII, fol. 190, verso.

It is difficult to conceive an evidence more forcibly to our purpose than this. According to the received chronology, Chaucer was, at the time when these verses were written, sixty-four or sixty-five years of age. But, if he was born in 1344, he was only forty-eight or forty-nine. It seems impossible to imagine that any man, speaking of his friend under fifty years of age, should employ such terms, and, in this ungracious way, give him his discharge from the theatre of literature and of life.

The evidence of Gower on this subject may be still further corroborated by the consideration of the manner in which Chaucer

^h Therefore.

speaks of his own age in the House of Fame. In that poem his celestial guide proposes to instruct him in the science of the stars; but Chaucer declines the proffered favour, giving as his reason, "For I am olde¹." It has been concluded by Mr. Tyrwhit, and that with very cogent reason, from another part of the poem, that Chaucer wrote the House of Fame while he occupied the situation of comptroller of the customs. The passage upon which his inference is built is this. Chaucer's conductor tells him,

not onely fro ferre countre
No tidingés comen to the,
Not of thy very neighbourés
That dwell'n almost at thy dorés
Thou herest neither that ne this:
For, when thy labour al done is,
And hast made al thy reckeninges,
Thou goest home to thy house——.

Book II, ver. 139.

¹ Book II, ver. 487.

Chaucer, as will fully appear in the course of this work, was comptroller of the customs, from June 1374^k, to December 1386^l. Taking therefore the mean of this period as the probable time of writing the House of Fame, the poet will, according to the received computation, be fifty-two years of age; but, according to the date inferred from his deposition, he will be only thirty-six, a period of life at which it is impossible that he should have declined the acquisition of a new science on pretence of his advanced age. We may carry forward the date of the House of Fame still three or four years further, but we cannot refer it to a later period, on account of the unfortunate season of his exile and imprisonment, which commenced about November 1384^l; and this will not materially help the argument for regulating the date of Chaucer's birth by the statement in his deposition.

^k Vol. II, Chap. XXXVI.

^l Vol. IV, Chap. L.

It may seem indeed a very bold supposition, to maintain that Chaucer was fifty-eight years of age, at the time that he declared himself "forty years old and upward." But less than this appears scarcely sufficient to bear out the events of his life, and the language of Gower, as well as his own, taken from the House of Fame, upon the subject. If we confess ourselves obliged to desert his own testimony and the idea that he was born so late as the year 1344, we are then placed at large in the wide field of conjecture; and I do not, in that case, feel myself inclined to "remove old landmarks," and set aside the date which has hitherto always been received, though we do not exactly know the authority upon which it is founded.

I should perhaps have incorporated these reasonings upon the period of the birth of Chaucer in the body of the work, if it had been in my power to do so. But the document to which they relate was not communicated to me, till some sheets of my book were already printed. The place at present

assigned them may perhaps however be the most eligible, since the novelty of the views to which they relate seems to have entitled them to a separate disquisition.

them to a separate disposition.

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L I F E
OF
C H A U C E R.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH OF CHAUCER.—DESCRIPTION OF LONDON
IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

THE question of when Chaucer was born and when he died, as usually happens in the history of private persons living at periods so remote from the epoch when genuine and authentic records have been multiplied, is involved in considerable obscurity. It is necessary however that these dates, as far as that can be effected, should be settled in the first place, as a sort of frame and standard, in conformity to which intermediate and inferior points may most satisfactorily be adjusted.

CHAP. I.

Time of the
birth of
Chaucer.

CHAP. I.

1328.

The principal authority upon this head is the inscription on his tomb. Chaucer was interred in Westminster Abbey^a, the burial place of most of our English princes since Edward the Confessor. To Chaucer it owes a still more celebrated distinction. He was interred here by accident^b; but that circumstance gave a tone to succeeding times, and the place where the remains of the father of English poetry were laid, has long continued the depository of deceased genius and literary eminence.

Unfortunately the original inscription over Chaucer's grave has long since been obliterated. It is said to have been placed there at the expence of William Caxton^c, who first introduced the art of printing into England, and who appears to have been born about

^a Caxton, Edition of Chaucer, apud Ames's Typographical Antiquities; Leland, Scriptores Britannici, cap. DV.

^b Leland says, "While he was endeavouring to make a full arrangement of his affairs at London, he died there, and was buried at Westminster." *Dum is Londini causas suas curaret, mortuus est*, etc.

^c Leland, Scrip. Brit.

twelve years after the death of Chaucer ; but CHAP. I.
all that has been handed down to us of 1328.
Caxton's inscription^d is in metre, and presents us with no part of the information which is most to be desired in a monumental record.

In the reign of the elder queen Mary, and the year 1556, Nicholas Brigham, a poet and man of learning of that time^e, erected a more sumptuous monument to the memory of Chaucer nearly on the same spot, the inscription of which may, with some little trouble, be deciphered at the present day. Here we are informed that Chaucer deceased 25 October 1400. We are however left to conjecture, whether this date was a transcript from the preceding inscription, or whether the liberal and right-minded founder of the present tomb collected his information from some other source. The name of Brigham, and the date 1556, make a part of the existing epitaph.

^d Caxton & Leland, ut supra.

^e Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses*, vol. I, art. 150.

CHAP. I.

1328.

Leland, the earliest of the biographers of Chaucer, says, that “ Chaucer was known and beloved for his virtues by Richard II, and that the same qualities proved his strongest recommendation to Henry IV, and his son who conquered France^f.” This account would imply that Chaucer was at least by thirty years younger than he is usually understood to have been. Later antiquaries are agreed in preferring the authority of the epitaph, which represents him as dying in the second year of Henry IV, to that of Leland. Indeed the latter is in irreconcilable opposition to the most authentic records and documents of the various events of his life, while the former perfectly agrees with them. Leland further remarks that “ Chaucer lived to the period of grey hairs, and at length found old age his greatest disease^g.”

^f *Nam, quem admodum Richardo Burdegalensi, Anglorum regi, cognitus, et virtutum nomine charus fuit; ita etiam Henrico quarto, et ejus filio, qui de Gallis triumphavit, eisdem titulis commendatissimus erat.*

Scriptores Britannici.

^g *Ad canos devenit, sensitque ipsam senectutem morbum esse.*

Mr. Tyrwhit says, "The birth of Chaucer CHAP. I.
in 1328 has been settled, I suppose, from 1328.
some inscription on his tomb-stone, signifying
that he died in 1400, at the age of 72^h." But there seems to be no visible ground for this assertion. Mr. Speght appears to be the first person who has ventured to assign the period of Chaucer's birthⁱ; and he quotes the above passage of Leland, which he probably compared with the time of his death stated by Brigham, as the foundation of his hypothesis. Whether he had any further grounds, traditional or otherwise, we are unable to pronounce. It is sufficiently evident from Chaucer's works, which are the best materials for arranging his life, that he lived to an advanced age. Mr. Speght's statement therefore may with sufficient propriety be admitted; and probability, where no further information can be obtained, may be allowed to stand in the place of proof.

The seat of Chaucer's nativity was the city Place of his
nativity.

^h Tyrwhit, Edition of Canterbury Tales, Preface, note C.

ⁱ Speght, Edition of Chaucer, 1597.

CHAP. I. of London. This is completely ascertained by his own words in the Testament of Love, Book I, Section 5. "Also the cite of London, that is to me so dere and swete, in which I was forth growen ; and more kindly love have I to that place, than to any other in yerth, as every kindly cature hath full appetite to that place of his kindly engendrure, and to wilne reste and pece in that stede to abide."

This passage contains nearly all the information we possess relative to the commencement of our poet's life. But it is fraught with various inferences. It is peremptory as to the place of his birth, or, as he calls it, of his "kindly engendrure" (that is, his geniture according to kind, or the course of nature). It renders it extremely probable that London was the abode of his tender years and the scene of his first education : so much is not unlikely to be implied in his giving it the appellation of the place in which he was "forth growen." Lastly, as he is in this passage assigning a reason why, many years after (in the fifty-sixth year of his age),

he interested himself in the welfare, and took CHAP. I.
a part in the dissensions, of the metropolis,
it may with some plausibility be inferred,
that his father was a merchant, and that he
was himself, by the circumstances of his
birth, entitled to the privileges of a citizen.

He who loves to follow the poet through
the various scenes from which his mind re-
ceives its first impressions, will be eager in
this place to recollect what sort of a city
London was in the beginning of the four-
teenth century, how far it resembled, and in
what respects it differed from, the present me-
tropolis of England.

Description
of Lon-
don.

I am afraid little doubt can be entertained
that, if we were to judge of it from the first
impression it was likely to make upon a
stranger, it would not have been found much
more advantageous than that of Paris at the
same era, which Petrarca describes (A. D.
1333) as “the most dirty and ill-smelling
town he had ever visited, Avignon only
excepted ^k.”

^k Epistolæ, apud Vie de Petrarque, tome I, p. 207.

CHAP. I.

Of this however we may be sure, that the impression which London produced on the mind of Chaucer, was very different from that of Paris on the mind of Petrarca. Petrarca viewed the cities of France with the prepossessions of an Italian, and the haughtiness of a pedant, proud that he owed his birth to the country of Cicero and Virgil, of Brutus and Cato, and looking on the rest of the world as a people of barbarians. Chaucer had none of these prejudices: he felt the great dictates of nature, and cherished them with the fondness of attachment. London, with its narrow lanes, and its dirty ways, its streets incumbered with commerce, and its people vexed with the cares of gain, was in his eyes beautiful, lovely, and engaging. “More kindly love and fuller appetite had he to that place than to any other in yerth.”

But, though London had at this time very little to boast on the score of its general architecture, it was already the scene of considerable population and wealth. The topographer who would attain to an exact idea of any of our principal towns at a remote

period of their history, must go back in the CHAP. I.
first place to the consideration of what they
were in the time of the Roman empire. For
near four centuries, from the year of Christ
50¹ to the year 450, Britain was a flourishing
and powerful colony to the great mistress of
the world. The Romans, in proportion as
they subdued her barbarous inhabitants,
founded cities, erected theatres, established
universities, constructed highways, and
adorned the island with magnificent works
of art, as well as planted within its circuit
the seeds of discipline, science, and literature.
England was then a civilised and a magnificent
scene, and would have presented as many
objects worthy of the curiosity of a traveller
of taste, as at any period of its subsequent
history. London was founded by the Ro-
mans, and inclosed with a wall, nearly equal
in extent to the present boundaries of the
city of London strictly so called. Its limits
were from about the foot of Black-Friars

under the
Romans.

¹ Tacit. Ann. lib. 14, c. 32.

CHAP. I. Bridge west to the Tower-Stairs east: on **the** north it extended to the street now denominated London Wall, and on the south **it** had another wall which skirted the whole length of the city along the shores of **the** river ^m.

under the
Saxons.

In that melancholy period, when the Roman empire in the west became universally a prey to the hordes of ferocious barbarians, England fell to the lot of certain piratical tribes from the north of Germany, since known by the general denomination of Anglo-Saxons. These invaders were successful in exterminating from among us all vestiges of literature and Roman civilisation. The Christian religion itself sunk under their hostility. The institutions of the ancient Germans and the mythology of Woden became universal. At the time when the monk St. Augustine arrived in this country

^m Maitland, History of London, B. i, c. 3, 4. Fitzstephen, Descriptio Londoniæ, apud Leland's Itinerary, vol. VIII.

for the pious purpose of converting its CHAP. I.
usurpers, A. D. 596, it has been supposed
that there was not a book to be found
through the whole extent of the islandⁿ.
From this time however there was a period
of comparative illumination. The Saxons
had poetry, and the missionaries from Rome
brought with them such literature as Europe
then had to boast. We had our Bede, our
Alcuin, and our Alfred. This infancy of
improvement was nearly crushed by the
Danes, the inveterate foes of monasteries
and learning, who were in the tenth century
what the Saxons had already been in the
sixth. England presents little to soothe the
eye of the lover of civilisation, from the
retreat of the Romans to the epoch of the
Norman conquest, when a race of warriors
educated in a happier scene, and a suc-
cession of kings nearly all of distinguished
ability, brought back to us the abode of the
muses and the arts of cultivated life.

ⁿ Henry, History of Great Britain, Book ii, ch. 4.

CHAP. I.

During this interval London, the heart of England, had experienced a common fate with the rest of its members. The walls indeed in considerable part remained, but the houses tumbled into ruin, and the tall grass waved in the streets: not that it was ever wholly unpeopled, but that it was an inconsiderable place, in comparison of the dimensions which the Romans had marked out for it. A short time however previously to the conquest it had a bridge of wood erected over the Thames^o, a work which would scarcely have been constructed in those rude times, if it had not even then been a flourishing city.

under the
Normans.

The Tower of London was constructed for the purpose of subjugation by William the Conqueror^p. William Rufus, who had a strong passion for magnificence, enlarged this edifice, rebuilt London Bridge on a more commodious plan, and laid the foundation of Westminster Hall^q. London Bridge was

^o Maitland, B. i, c. 7. ^p Stow's Annals, A. D. 1079.

^q Stow, A. D. 1099. Maitland, B. i, c. 6.

first built of stone under Henry the Second ^r. CHAP. I.
Edward the Confessor, who, a short time
before the conquest, imported some of the
Norman arts into Britain, first gave existence
to the city of Westminster, having built there
the Old Palace, and the venerable structure
known by the name of Westminster Ab-
bey ^s.

London also in the time of Chaucer con-
tained several royal palaces. The Tower was
long a principal residence of our kings; beside
which they had a smaller mansion very near
it, called the Royal, a second south of St.
Paul's, called the Wardrobe, and a third
nearly on the site of the present Bridewel.
This city was besides adorned with various
monasteries, the chief of which were the
Temple, which had lately been the residence
of the Knights Templars, but was now in
the occupation of the students at law; and
the monastery of St. John, belonging to the
Knights Hospitalers of St. John of Jerusalem,

and Planta-
genets.

^r Stow, A.D. 1176.

^s Maitland, B. vii, c. 1, 4.

CHAP. I. a gate of which is remaining to this day. It had many other buildings which, relatively to the times we are considering, might be styled magnificent^t.

Population
of London
under Ste-
phen.

The population of London is stated by Peter of Blois, a man of talents, and for the time in which he lived an elegant writer of Latin, at forty thousand persons in the reign of King Stephen^u. In the reign of Edward the First and the year 1285, the twenty-four wards of London are enumerated in a charter of that monarch nearly as at present^v, so that London must then have occupied the same space of ground as the city of London now occupies. We must not however suppose that this space was covered with inhabitants: Cheapside for example, we are told, was “no manner of street, but a fair large place, commonly called Crown Field^w,” and tournaments were held there in the reign of Edward

^t Maitland.

^u Ep. apud Hume, History of England, c. 7.

^v Maitland, Book i. c. 12.

^w Stow, A. D. 1246.

III^s. Among the environs of London we find enumerated the villages of Strand, Charing and Holborn^y. CHAP. I.

Respecting the population of London in the year 1349, when Chaucer was already twenty-one years of age, we have a ground of calculation of singular authenticity. That was a period when Europe, and nearly the whole known world was afflicted with a pestilence, more terrible than perhaps any other in the records of mankind. In England, our old historians assure us that scarcely the tenth person was left alive^z. Sir Walter Manny, one of the most distinguished warriors and courtiers of Edward III, purchased at this time a piece of ground, now the site of the Charter-House, for the interment of such persons as the churches and church-yards of London might not suffice to bury; and it appears from an inscription upon a stone-cross erected on the spot, which remained

under Ed-
ward III.

^x Stow, A. D. 1330.

^y Maitland, Book ii, c. 23, Book vii, c. 4.

^z Stow, A. D. 1348.

CHAP. I. in the time of these historians, that more than fifty thousand persons were buried in this ground in the space of one year. Maitland in his History of London very naturally observes, that this cannot be supposed to exceed the amount of one half of the persons who died in that period^a. One hundred thousand persons therefore may safely be taken to be a part, whatever part we may choose to imagine it, of the population of London at that period.

Wealth of
its citizens.

Nor did the wealth and commerce of London by any means fail of their due proportion to the number of its inhabitants. Of this many striking examples may be produced. The father of Michael de la Pole, earl of Suffolk and lord chancellor to king Richard the Second, was a merchant; and the first cause of the subsequent eminence of the son, was the loans of money advanced at several times by the father to Edward III, to assist him in the prosecution of his wars in France^b.

^a Maitland, Book i, c. 14.

^b Stow, A. D. 1339.

In the year next after the battle of Poitiers, CHAP. I.
Henry Picard, vintner, or wine-merchant, mayor of London, gave a sumptuous entertainment to four kings, Edward king of England, John king of France, David king of Scots, and the king of Cyprus. The circumstances of the entertainment are thus characteristically described by the old historian. "After dinner the sayd Henry Picard kept his hall against all commers whosoever, that were willing to play at dice and hazard. In like manner the ladie Margaret his wife did also keepe her chamber to the same intent. The king of Cipres playing with Henry Picard in his hall, did winne of him fiftie markes, but Henry being very skilfull in that arte, altering his hand did after winne of the same king, the same fiftie markes and fiftie markes more, which when the same king began to take in ill parte, although hee dissembled the same, Henry sayd unto him, My Lord and King be not agreeved, I covet not your gold but your play, for I have not bidde you hither that I might greeve you, but that amongst other thinges I might trie

CHAP. I. your play, and gave him his money againe, plentifully bestowing of his owne amongst the retinue: besides, hee gave many rich giftes to the king and other nobles and knightes, which dined with him ^c."

In the second year of king Richard the Second, John Mercer, a Scotchman, having fitted out a piratical fleet against the English, John Philpot a citizen of London, whom we shall have occasion again to mention in the course of this history, hired with his own money to the number of a thousand soldiers, and, putting to sea, in a short time took the said John Mercer, with all his prizes, and fifteen valuable Spanish ships which he had drawn to his assistance^d.

In the same reign sir Richard Whittington, mayor of London, of whom so many traditional and improbable stories are told, rebuilt at his own expence the jail of Newgate, the library of the Gray Friars, the hospital of Little St. Bartholomew's, and a college near

^c Stow, A. D. 1357. ^d Ditto, A. D. 1378.

St. Paul's, which was called after his own name^e. CHAP. I.

The story of sir William Walworth's contention with Wat Tyler, and the gallantry and high spirit he displayed on the occasion, are too well known to need to be recited here. The increase of the towns and the progress of commerce were the immediate causes of that great revolution in the thirteenth century, the rise of the commons; and we shall be at a loss to understand many circumstances in the history of this period, if we do not distinctly recollect that the wealthy merchants of England and the neighbouring countries were now enabled to enter into a sort of rivalry with the ancient barons, which these latter wished perhaps, but were not able, to despise. The citizens had not yet learned the sordid habits of later times, and appear to have copied with success the purest models that were afforded them by their contemporaries. The father of Chaucer is conjectured

^e Sir George Buck's Third University, c. 32, 34.

CHAP. I. by one of his editors^f, to have been, like Henry Picard, a vintner, or merchant of the vintry. Such then were the scenes which our poet first beheld, and the description of persons with whom his infant years were connected.

^f Speght, Ed. of Chaucer, 1598.

CHAP. II.

EDUCATION OF CHAUCER.—STATE OF LEARNING
IN ENGLAND UNDER THE NORMAN AND PLAN-
TAGENETS PRINCES.

CHAUCER appears to have passed the CHAP. II.
latter years of his education at the university
of Cambridge. He speaks of himself as
residing there at the age of eighteen^a. It
is probable from the words above quoted from
his Testament of Love, that he received his
first initiation in letters in the city of
London.

We are extremely apt to put the cheat Learning
under the
Normans.
upon our imaginations by the familiar and
indiscriminate use we make of the terms,
the dark, and the barbarous ages. These

^a Court of Love. See below.

CHAP. II. terms are far from being applicable, without material distinctions, to the times in which Chaucer was born. The muddy effervescence which was stirred up in Europe by the continual influx of the barbarians, subsided in a considerable degree in the eleventh century. William the Norman may be considered as having introduced politeness and learning into this island^b; and, being succeeded after an interval by his youngest son, upon whom he had bestowed a careful and elaborate education, and to whom his contemporaries gave the appellation of *Beau-clerc*, or the fine scholar, the empire of literature became so fixed among us as not to be easily capable of being exterminated. Henry II. was still more conspicuously the patron of letters than Henry I. His court was crowded with scholars, poets and elegant writers^c. His greatest and most illus-

^b Malmesbury, apud Scriptores post Bedam, Lib. II, p. 101,

2. Warton, History of English Poetry, Diss. II, sign. f.

^c De la Rue, apud Archæologia, [the periodical publication of the London Antiquarian Society] Vol. XII, p. 72, 76, 314. Warton, Diss. II, sign. g.

trious subject, Thomas of Becket, drew CHAP. II.
around him a circle of literary men, whose
correspondence has been handed down to us,
and who every where compliment each other
with the appellation of philosophers. The
Latin style of John of Salisbury, Peter of
Blois, and Joseph of Exeter, who were among
this number, is more elegant than that of the
Latin writers of any other age, from the fall
of the Western empire to the reformation:
nor are the conceptions of John of Salisbury
in particular, the admirable good-sense of his
remarks, and the pointedness of his satire, in
any way inferior to the choice of his lan-
guage.

Contemporary with the reign of our Henry
I, other memorable exertions were making
to free the intellect of Europe from that
state of torpor, in which it had now been
sunk for several ages. The Saracens, par-
ticularly under the caliph Almamon who
reigned in the beginning of the ninth century,
had made considerable strides in the advance-
ment of science, and, with the exception of
its poets and historians, had rendered the

Travellers
in the
East.

CHAP. II. stores of Grecian literature their own, by a translation into Arabic. Early in the twelfth century several enterprising Europeans, urged by the thirst of knowledge, and instructed by the observations of the crusaders as to the spot where they might successfully seek it, passed over into Asia, and brought back with them, among various acquisitions, the elements of the sciences of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, medicine, natural history, alchemy, astronomy, astrology, and the Aristotelian philosophy^d. The Aristotelian philosophy furnished a groundwork for the achievements of those illustrious champions of human intellect commonly known by the appellation of the schoolmen.

Popular histories.

Such were the beginnings of the revival of letters in the West of Europe. No sooner was the field of improvement laid open, than the progress was seen to be not less auspicious and noble than the commence-

^d Brucker's History of Philosophy by Enfield, B. vii, ch. 2.

ment. Among various circumstances worthy CHAP. II.
of notice, our ancestors seem to have been
in no inconsiderable degree indebted, how-
ever fortuitous the concurrence may appear,
to the labours of an officer of the court of
Constantinople about the year 1070, by
name Simeon Seth. This man was learned
in the Oriental tongues, and, beside other
works, translated from Persian and Arabic
into Greek, a fabulous history of the ex-
ploits of Alexander the Great, and the book
which under different forms has commonly
been known by the name of the Fables of
Pilpay. The first of these pieces received
almost immediately a version into Latin from
an unknown hand, and in this form became
familiar to the European nations. The latter
was imitated, soon after the year 1106, by
Piers Alfonse, a converted Jew, whose writ-
ings were well known in the time of Chaucer,
and furnished, about the close of the century,
the basis of a work, highly celebrated in
those days, entitled *Gesta Romanorum*^e. The

^e Tyrwhit, Canterbury Tales, note on Piers Alfonse.
Warton, Vol. 1, sect. 3.

CHAP. II. above-named productions of Simeon Seth, together with the writings of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, which probably owed the popularity they now acquired to the pretensions advanced at this time by several Western nations to a Trojan original, supplied the first intimations of ancient history to the scholars who lived under the Normans and the Plantagenets. Upon the groundwork furnished by Turpin, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, (writers whom we shall presently have occasion to mention) by Simeon Seth, and by the pretended historians of the Trojan war, the French and Latin poets of the reign of Henry II. built their lucubrations; and, to crown the literary glories of the period of that monarch, Galfride *de Vino Salvo*, a monk of St. Frideswide near Oxford, produced a Latin poem on the art of writing verse, entitled *De Nova Poetria*.

Learning in
the thir-
teenth
century.

The thirteenth century witnessed the studies of William de Lorris, Guido dalla Colonna author of the Troy-Book which was afterward translated by Lydgate, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Alfonso king of Castille inventor of the Alfonsine tables of astro-

nommy, Dante Alighieri, and Roger Bacon. CHAP. II.
 Most of these illustrious names we shall
 have cause to refer to on future occasions.

The century however in which Chaucer lived, and those which immediately preceded, laboured under one disadvantage from which we have happily escaped. The invention of printing has enabled us to multiply books almost to the extent of human want, and has rendered them cheap and accessible to a great portion of our species. In these early times it was otherwise. Seven hundred volumes were esteemed to afford a foundation for a national library^f. But the times of Chaucer did not in this respect suffer a disadvantage peculiarly their own. The best ages of Greece and Rome had no other method for multiplying copies than by the tedious process of transcription. This undoubtedly prevented literature from being within the reach of so large a portion of the community as at present, but was not incompatible with

Disadvantages of literature in these times.

1. paucity of books.

^f Warton, Diss. II, sign. b.

CHAP. II. learning. If we look over the list of authors quoted by Chaucer^s and other writers of that period, we shall find it considerably numerous. The libraries of monasteries probably in a great degree supplied the disadvantage arising from the small collections of individuals. They were prevented from being so minute and accurate in quotation as scholars of our own times frequently are, but not from being learned.

2. Papal superstition.

Another disadvantage incident to this remote period was the gloomy and despotic empire of papal superstition. This was in its highest pride of power under the emperors Henry III. and Henry IV. in the eleventh century, and even under our Henry II, whose age was to a considerable degree an age of letters, in the twelfth. But this evil was greatly diminished before the time of Chaucer. Popes no longer ventured to talk of depriving monarchs of their crowns. The Italian writers had descanted with great free-

^s See Speght's and Urry's Editions.

dom upon the corruptions of the church. In CHAP. II.
England the scandalous lives of the monks
were a favourite topic of invective. The
idea had even been started and gravely dis-
cussed in the parliaments of Edward III, of
throwing off the yoke of Rome^h. The
king, the princess of Wales, and several of
the greatest persons in the realm, were su-
spected of favouring the doctrines of Wic-
liffeⁱ: John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster,
and many of the ablest and most skilful
courtiers avowed themselves his abettorsⁱ.
When we consider these things, we are al-
most astonished that this fervour subsided,
and that the spirit of resistance to superstition
appears to have gained no ground from the
close of the fourteenth to the commence-
ment of the sixteenth century. Popery how-
ever had acquired so complete an ascendancy,
that nothing less than the art of printing could
give it a decisive and irrecoverable blow.

^h Cotton, Abridgment of Records, apud Hume, chap. 16.

ⁱ Lewis's Life of Wicliffe, c. 10.

CHAP. II.

Meanwhile, in spite of all the appearances which favoured intellectual freedom in matters of religion, our countrymen still laboured under the most powerful restraints. The right of the church to condemn speculative tenets of opinion, and to proscribe writings offensive to the reigning religion, had scarcely been questioned. It was in the year 1616 that Galileo was condemned for asserting the diurnal motion of the earth.

3. discredit
of the
English
language.

There was besides an incidental disadvantage in this island, which powerfully operated to check the growth of English literature. This was the state of our language. When William the Norman ascended the throne, he brought over with him great multitudes of his native nobility, and it was the policy of his reign and the reigns of his immediate successors, firmly and unrelentingly to depress the former inhabitants of the island. William possessed great and important districts in France, and under Henry II. these acquired a vast additional extent. A great portion of the nobility under these princes were natives of France, and most of

those who were not strictly so, possessed CHAP. II. estates in that country. Living in intercourse with each other and with their neighbours on the continent, and despising the rudeness and barbarity of the Saxon race, the vernacular language of our island sunk into neglect and contempt. Few of the nobles or of the dignified clergy were able to express themselves in it on the most ordinary subjects. Our laws, our pleadings, our parliamentary discussions, and our deeds of inheritance, were all French. The very boys at school were confined to translate the phraseology of the Latin classics into that language^k. The princes of the Norman line, who were encouragers of literature, had no conception of any literature which was not Latin or French. That language, which in its constituent members is the same which has since been immortalised in the writings of Shakespear, Bacon and Milton,

^k Ingulph. apud Scriptores post Bedam, p. 901. Higden, Polychronicon, apud Tyrwhit, Essay, note 21.

CHAP. II. was at this time threatened with total extinction.

Schools in
London.

Yet, whatever were the disadvantages to which learning was exposed, there was a great portion of it among us. London itself was one of its favourite seats. This has induced some of our old writers to style it the third university¹. The liberal sciences had not yet so fixed and denizenized themselves at Oxford and Cambridge as they have since done. The oldest colleges in these universities were founded between the middle of the thirteenth and the middle of the fourteenth centuries. Till that time students resided indiscriminately in such lodgings as they could procure among the citizens of these places. A variety of incidental circumstances successively concurred to give to Oxford and Cambridge the distinctive character which they have since borne. William Fitzstephen, the historian and friend of Thomas of Becket, in a Description of London an-

¹ Vid. Sir Geo. Buck.

nexed to his Life of that Prelate, has treated CHAP. II. with some minuteness the studies which in his time were pursued in this metropolis. He informs us that "three principal churches in London," supposed to be St. Paul's, St. Peter's Cornhil, and Westminster, "had their respective schools adjoining, of notable privilege and venerable antiquity. In addition to these there were others which, under the patronage of some individuals, or sustained by the fame of such celebrated doctors as taught in them, were permitted their several institutions. On holidays the masters of these schools held their public assemblies in certain churches assigned for that purpose. The elder scholars engaged in demonstrative or dialectical disputation, some using enthymems, and others the regular syllogism. Some exercised their art in the spirit of an ostentatious contest, and others with a reverent anxiety for the discovery of truth. The former rested their reputation upon the arrangement and inundation of words, while their logic could boast no better than an external speciousness.

CHAP. II. Orators then delivered their respective declamations, using every topic of persuasion, adhering to all the rules of art, and careful to omit no branch of their subject. The younger boys contended with each other in verse, or tried who could give the most accurate statement of the elements of grammar, and the rules respecting the preterits and futures of verbs. The whole was wound up with a recitation of epigrams, ballads and rhymes, in which was revived the ancient Fescennine liberty of sarcasm, and, without naming individuals, the foibles and frailties of each, or the secret history of his ancestors, were made the subject of biting mockeries and taunts in the Socratic manner, the speakers at the same time taking care not to overstep the decorum due to the situation. The auditors, prepared to enter into the jest, shook the assembly with peals of laughter^{m.}"

Whether London retained, from the time

^m Fitzstephen, apud Leland's Itinerary, vol. VIII.

of William Fitzstephen to that of Chaucer, CHAP. II.
so many characteristics of an university as
are here described, may be doubted. It is
probable that, as the establishments of Oxford
and Cambridge increased in stability and ex-
tensiveness of foundation, the rival colleges
of the metropolis declined. It is not how-
ever to be imagined that a young man so
advantageously circumstanced as to be de-
signed to finish his general education at the
universities, and afterward, as we have some
reason to believe, to remove to the inns of
court, was not made to partake of every
advantage that the scholastic institutions of
the city in which he resided could afford, for
the cultivation of his infant mind. Private
tuition, in the sense in which we now under-
stand it, was as yet scarcely invented. Young
persons upon whom the discipline of edu-
cation was intended to be bestowed, were
either placed in the families of some of our
principal nobility, where a sort of seminary
was formed for their improvement in the
exercises of the mind, and still more in those
of the body, or were sent to some of those

CHAP. II. public resorts of learning, which for a certain stipend were accessible to all. There seems no reason to believe that Chaucer's boyish days were spent under the auspices of nobility. His early poem of Troilus and Creseide is inscribed to no more magnificent patrons than the "moral Gower, and the philosophical Strode". We may therefore image to ourselves our youthful poet as resorting daily to some one of the classical seminaries of the metropolis, and in the language of Fitzstephen, "contending with his fellows for the prize of Latin verse, or emulously reciting with them the elements of grammar, and the rules for the preterits and futures of Latin verbs."

Here doubtless Chaucer became acquainted with many of the Roman writers: of the Greek language it does not appear that he had any knowledge; the words of Homer, Pindar, Demosthenes and Thucydides, never sounded in his ears, or rolled from his tongue.

ⁿ Troilus and Creseide, Book V, ver. 1855, 6.

He never drank from their pure and primeval wells of poetry ; he held no intercourse with their manly sense, and their ardent passion for liberty. Among the Latins the nobler classics were almost uniformly deserted : the energy of Lucretius, the simplicity of Tibullus, the unaffected manner of Terence, and the poignant gaiety of Horace were forgotten ; Virgil was comparatively neglected ; the favourite Roman poets were Ovid, Lucan, Statius and Prudentius. In prose Cicero and Livy were rarely consulted ; but the daily amusement of scholars was in the unnatural style of Seneca and Boethius, or the desultory collections of Macrobius and Valerius Maximus^o. To these they added the Latin compositions of authors who had preceded by a century or two the period in which they lived. The writers of Latin verse in the twelfth century have already been mentioned with commendation ; the *Bellum Trojanum* and the *Antiocheis* of Jo-

^o Chaucer's Works, passim. See also in Speght's and Urry's Editions, the list of authors quoted by Chaucer.

CHAP. II. seph of Exeter, and the Phillippid of Guillaume le Breton, were particularly admired; and the Alexandreid of Gualtier de Chatillon was equalled with the most perfect productions of antiquity^p.

^p Warton, Diss. II, sign. i.

CHAP. III.

SCHOOL-BOY AMUSEMENTS OF CHAUCER: ROMANCE.—GROWTH AND INTIMATE CONNECTION OF THE FEUDAL SYSTEM, OF CHIVALRY AND ROMANCE.

SUCH were the authors some of whom CHAP. III. were read by Chaucer in the regular series of his school-education: there were others who it can scarcely be questioned furnished some of the favourite recreations of his boyish years. These were the writers of romance. Several of their most popular productions are thus enumerated by him in his Rime of Sire Thopas.

Men speken of romaunces of pris,
Of Hornchild and of Ipotis,
Of Bevis and sire Guy,
Of sire Libeux and Pleindamour,
But sire Thopas he bereth the flour
Of ^a real chevalrie.

CANT. TALES, ver. 13830.

^a Royal.

CHAP. III.

Romance was the offspring of chivalry; as chivalry again was the offspring of the feudal system. Each of these sprang up in succession, from the chaos introduced by the barbarian tribes who overwhelmed the Western Empire. The feudal system, in strictness of speech, may be considered as commencing in the ninth century, and began to decline about the middle of the twelfth. Chivalry is referred by the ablest writers on the subject to the eleventh century^b. The first romances we possess were the production of the century immediately following. These three causes principally contributed to generate the character and manners which distinguished the age of Chaucer.

Political
system
which
succeeded
the Ro-
man em-
pire.

The feudal system was particularly military, and was invented, or at least carried to perfection, from views of defence. Its first model was derived from the distribution made by the king or his great lords, of their demesnes or immediate property, to their cour-

^b St. Palaye, *Memoires sur l'Ancienne Chevalerie*, Partie II.

tiers or attendants. When the northern barbarians first settled in the provinces of the Roman empire, the whole of the tracts they subdued, with a certain reserve in favour of the preceding inhabitants, was divided according to a given proportion among the individuals who subdued it. The wants of the original invaders were few; the portions into which the territory was divided were numerous and of small extent; and every possessor of one of these portions had a voice in the decision of national affairs. The lands therefore which each man held, were on the principle of *allodium*, or free tenure; burthened only with certain engagements for the public service, and the occasions when this service was to be performed, subject to the decision of a national assembly. The king, or commander in chief, had a landed estate assigned him, large enough for the maintenance of his dignity and authority without demanding contributions of his subjects. CHAP. III.

The gradual change which was operated in a few centuries of the allodial into feudal tenure, was the result of a certain degree of

Rise of the
feudal
system.

CHAP. III. luxury and refinement. In proportion as the conquerors of the Roman empire relaxed from the simplicity of their manners, a greater extent of wealth was demanded, to enable the chief magistrate to support his dignity. The nobles, or more eminent subjects, imitated the example of their chief, and aspired to possess a larger tract of country than had in the first distribution been allotted them. The king for his own convenience found it advisable to distribute the lands he possessed among his courtiers, who were permitted to enjoy the produce, on certain conditions which were prescribed to them for the benefit of their lord. The grants thus made had originally nothing in view but the advantage of the chief; the property continued vested in him; the actual holders of the lands were his stewards or servants, indued with such immunities as were best calculated to render their service or superintendence effectual. The grants therefore were at first during pleasure; then, as agriculture and civilisation advanced, annual; then for ten years, or for life; and at length, with certain limitations, to the

heirs of the original holder. The idea of CHAP. III. property in the chief however was never lost sight of; a feudal tenure being always conferred as the pledge of future services, while the allodial was given as a reward for the past. In every stage of the fief the tenant was not only strictly held to military service and aid in proportion to the extent of his possessions; but, as the stability of the tenure advanced, it was incumbered with homage, wardship, marriage, relief and pecuniary aids: that is, the tenant was obliged to present himself with certain marks of humiliation before his lord; each successive holder was to pay a certain fine to his superior for the grace of being admitted to succession; if he were a minor, he and his estates were taken into the direction of the lord, to be used, within certain limits, as he should think proper; the lord had the power of disposing of him in marriage; and he was bound to the three great pecuniary aids, the contributing a certain sum to ransom his lord when a captive, to portion his eldest daughter in marriage, and to defray the expences of the solemn fes-

CHAP. III. tival which was held when his eldest son was made a knight.

universally
adopted.

The advantage possessed by the allodial landholder over the feudal tenant at first sight appears to be so great, that we can scarcely avoid the imagining to ourselves that it was eagerly maintained and passionately cherished. Yet in the course of a century or two from the era of Charlemagne almost the whole allodial property of the chief countries of Europe was gradually converted into feudal tenure. This was entirely owing to the turbulent and disordered state of society then prevailing. The barbarism of these times it is difficult for us without a violent stretch of fancy to conceive. There was no public law ; or the voice of public law was unheard and ineffectual. There was no magistracy ; or the magistrate possessed no power to bring the offender before him, and to enforce his decisions. The conquerors of the Roman empire learned certain lessons of luxury and artificial wants from the people they subdued ; property became unequally distributed ; and every petty chieftain regarded himself as the

equal of his prince. The power of the sove-CHAP. III.
reign was considerable in a period of national
war; but in times of public peace was reduced
to almost nothing. The evil in this respect
was small, while the estates of individuals
were scanty, and each man could easily be
brought under the control of the national as-
sembly. But, as property became vested in
few hands, the mischief swelled to the most
enormous height. Private war, that is, a
violent attempt on the part of any one who
thought himself injured to redress or avenge
his own injury, was nearly universal; and it
will be scarcely necessary to give our ima-
ginations much scope, to represent to our-
selves the horrible mischiefs which must arise
from such a mode of proceeding. Their quar-
rels, and schemes of mutual aggression and
resentment, descended from father to son;
all the relations of the parties were obliged,
on pain of infamy, to take part in the feud.
Some of the first remedies which were thought
of to check this growing evil need only be
mentioned, to convince us how terrible was
its nature, and how obstinate its symptoms.

CHAP. III. Two of these were denominated the Truce of God, and the Peace of the King. By the former, all acts of private hostility were forbidden from Thursday night in each week to the morning of the Monday following; and by the latter, hostilities of this sort were not allowed to commence till forty days after the commission of the imputed crime they were instituted to avenge.

The feudal system was far from extinguishing all the evils to which it was intended to apply. But it was a remedy suited to the genius of the times in which it arose; and it drew much closer than they had before been drawn, the bonds of civil society. It was first tried, as has already been stated, on a smaller scale, and applied only to the immediate property of the sovereign. When it became extended over spacious monarchies, like France and Germany, the whole soil of those monarchies was treated, by a splendid fiction, which strikes our imagination by its boldness and grandeur, as the sole and direct property of the first magistrate. The king found his benefit in a scheme so flattering to

his state, and so advantageous to his prerogative: and the subject found his benefit in a scheme which drew the different members of the community so near to each other, and erected the whole body of proprietors into a mighty army, capable of being called forth, when any powerful emergency demanded it, at the shortest notice^c. CHAP. III.

Such is the main outline of the feudal system, which, though long since destroyed in its most essential elements, is the legitimate source of an hundred institutions and an hundred abuses which still prevail in European society. In the days of Chaucer this system was indeed already a ruin, but the main lineaments of the edifice remained; and it was impossible for an individual of those times to open his eyes without their presenting themselves to his view. The feudal system was the direct parent of the ideas of chivalry. Its decline.

In the times we have described, which preceded the feudal institution, began the Nature of chivalry.

^c Spelman, Montesquieu, Mably, Robertson, Millar.

CHAP. III.

practice which afterward gained the appellation of knight-errantry. In remote ages and countries of the world we find a great similarity between the ideas and customs of nations in a similar stage of the social progress. Hercules and Theseus were the knight-errants of antiquity. They destroyed wild beasts with which the unpeopled regions were infested, and exterminated robbers. These, by the imagination of an ignorant and superstitious age, were converted into giants and dragons.

But the feudal system gave permanence and body to a character which otherwise would speedily have perished. This system was entirely military. Recourse to the corporeal energies of the human frame for the decision of differences, was sufficiently common in the era which preceded the feudal system; but that scheme of policy gave order, and a compact and disciplined motion, to the exertion of those energies. Each landed proprietor was a soldier, and was bound by the tenor of his obligation to follow his lord on horseback, when he went to war. A

soldier therefore, in the ideas of these times, CHAP. III. was the first of human characters. To this profession every honourable father carefully educated his son. They had no learning, no politeness and no arts, to enter into competition with this education. Every young man of birth therefore was excited from his earliest infancy to contemplate arms with burning enthusiasm. As soon as he was of an age to handle them, several hours of every day were spent in studying the graceful and masterly use of them. The fair sex, in all ages sufficiently prone to the admiration of a soldier, had now no other object of attachment and honour. The effect of this situation was reciprocal and sympathetic. The lady loved and adored the military adventurer; the man of generous strain became a military adventurer that he might gain the favour of his mistress. The young champion, when accomplished in the practice of his art, panted for a theatre on which to display it; and a theatre for military achievements, in those days was never sought in vain. When a scene of real war did not readily present itself,

CHAP. III. the mockery was substituted in its room; tilts, tournaments, justs and defiances. In those days the administration of civil justice was inexpressibly imperfect; and, before the feudal system was introduced, ordeals and miracles had been substituted by the superstitious, in place of the investigation of evidence, and the impartiality of a dispassionate hearing. When chivalry became universal, the appeal to the sword superseded all other expedients, and the person accused of treason, rape or murder, threw down his gauntlet, and challenged his libeller to prove the truth of his charge by dint of mortal combat^d.

Definition
of ro-
mance.

Romance was the record of the adventures of persons educated in these arts and these habits of thinking, in which the individual who rehearsed them allowed himself to animate his narrative, by the introduction of a thousand supernatural and impossible ornaments: impossible to us, but which the bigotry and ignorance of those ages listened

^d St. Palaye, Memoires sur l'Ancienne Chevalerie.

to with reverence, and admitted with all the CHAP. III.
passiveness of the most doting credulity.

Romance was a species of composition ori- Its origin.
ginally contrived to be sung at festivals and
convivial meetings, and to be accompanied
with the accord of musical instruments. The
simple manners of our ancestors in a remote
age afforded so slender sources of recreation
and novelty, as to render the performances of
harpers and minstrels objects of high estima-
tion. Amusements of this sort may be traced
as far back as the records of any nation can
lead us. Achilles played upon the lyre, and
Alcinous had his musician, who sang heroic
tales to the sound of his harp^c. In the earliest
accounts of Britain this species of entertain-
ment appears to have been a branch of re-
ligion; and the Bards, no less than the Druids,
formed a part of the hierarchy of the original
inhabitants of this island. With the poets
of the Northern nations, the conquerors of
the mistress of the world, we have still better

^c Homer, Iliad and Odyssey.

CHAP. III. opportunities for a familiar acquaintance, as several of their productions have come down to us. The Scalds, that is, the Runic or Scandinavian poets, are probably to be considered as the legitimate parents of the romance of the middle ages : in their writings we are presented with giants, fairies, dragons, enchantments, and the other great materials of the wonderful scenes invented in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries^f.

But it is perhaps after the recital of extraordinary adventures were in a great degree detached from religious ceremonies and the mythology of the state, that the bardic or minstrel art becomes most interesting to a modern imagination. As long as the alliance of the priest and the poet maintained its entire intimacy, there is a solemnity in the performances of the latter, which subdues and appals us. All is sacred, mysterious and obscure ; and the whole comes to our minds

^f Mallet, Introduction à l'Histoire de Dannemarc : Percy, Essay on the Ancient English Minstrels, prefixed to Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, Edit. 1794.

forcibly blended with the craft of political im-
position, and the gloomy fears of enthusiastic
ignorance. But no sooner had Christianity
proclaimed a divorce between theology and
poetry, than the reciter of heroic adventures
felt himself independent and at large. His
imagination was no longer curbed ; his temper
became frolic and sportful ; and he mingled
his recitals at will with the wildnesses of an
untrammelled fancy, and the occasional ebul-
litions of a satiric vein. The rhapsodies of the
minstrel were in this stage universally intro-
duced into the houses of the wealthy and the
great ; they made a part of every splendid
festival or genial entertainment ; and, if we
could revisit the halls of our ancestors, such
as they were during this period, instead of
regarding them, as we are too apt to do, as
the abodes of untaught savages, we should
rather be prompted to consider them as the seats
of refinement and the haunts of the muses.
The minstrel profession still subsisted in its
highest prosperity in the time of Chaucer *.

* Percy, ubi supra.

CHAP. III.

In the succession of poets from the destruction of the Roman empire in the West, it is easy to trace a gradual advance in the merits of each race over the race which went before; of the Danes over the Saxons, and of the Normans over the Danes. This does not seem to have been originally owing to any superiority in one of these barbarian hordes over another, all of whom emigrated from the same division of Europe, but to the circumstances which marked their early history. The Saxons left their native retreats in a more infant and unformed period of social life. Like a young man who has the misfortune to enter too soon into possession of his patrimonial estate, the fortune of their childhood introduced them to a scene of ease and comparative indulgence. They acquired the advantages of agriculture, and many of the arts of life, not by their own exertions. They quitted the element which had nursed them, and destroyed their ships: from the period of their settlement to the days of Alfred, England was completely without a navy. They gave themselves up to luxury and the caprices of sloth. The religion which

Character
of the
Saxons.

Augustine and the monks of the seventh CHAP. III.
century gave them in the room of their native
mythology, had no favourable effect upon
their intellect or their courage.

The Danes were a race of men more of the
Danes
favoured by fortune than the Saxons. They
passed through a long probation of hardy
expedients and stern necessity. In their
native woods they brooded over the gloomy
and gigantic conceptions which elevate the
savage mind; they formed their spirits in
unison with the rugged and sublime scenery
which every way surrounded them; and they
worshipped the deities to which their own
free and heroic imaginations had first given
birth. There is no need of much argument
to convince us that the poets of such a nation
were greatly superior to those who (as Bede
relates of the Saxons) were chiefly engaged
in celebrating in monkish verse the history of
the book of Genesis, the incarnation of our
Saviour, the giving of the Holy Ghost, and
the preaching of the apostles^b. Accordingly

^b Bede, Hist. Eccles., apud Henry, B. ii, chap. 5.

CHAP. III. the Saxons, though the Runic poetry was almost extinguished among them, were not insensible to its charms, when incidentally restored to them by the inroads of the Danes. "It would be endless," says a celebrated antiquary, "to name all the poets of the north who flourished in the courts of the kings of England, or to relate the distinguished honours and magnificent presents which were heaped upon them¹."

and of the
Normans.

The Normans are a race of men who command our admiration and respect in a much higher degree than either the Saxons or the Danes. They were a band of soldiers who never fled before an enemy. In their first irruptions from the north they established themselves in a fair and fertile province of France, almost immediately under the eye of the successors of Charlemagne. Thence they spread their warlike bands through Italy, Sicily and England. Every where they were feared; they were looked up to as a superior race of

¹ Olaus Wormius, *Literatura Danica*, apud Henry, B. ii, chap. 5.

men; their friendship was courted, and their CHAP. III. enmity deprecated. Nor did they excel only in arms; in policy, in the arts of life, in the cultivation of all that is refined and beautiful, and in generosity of sentiment, they appear to have given the tone to Europe. They were besides the most successful suitors to the muses, and we shall see reason to consider them as eminently the fathers of modern poetry^{*}.—To return to the invention, the genealogy of which is thus to be traced.

It is one characteristic of the old romance, a characteristic which might well be expected from the relative ignorance of the times in which this species of composition arose, that, whatever heroes were chosen for the subject of its narratives, whether they had existed only two or three ages before, or were taken from the remotest periods of Greece and Rome, its authors bestowed upon them all without scruple the peculiar manners which discriminated the age of chivalry.

Features of
the old
romance,

^{*} Malmesbury, ubi supra: Gibbon, chap. LVI: De la Rue, apud Archæologia, vol. XII.

CHAP. III.

Its rise.

The first subjects of the compositions particularly distinguished by this title, appear to have been Charlemagne emperor of the West, and Arthur king of Britain. Taillefer, a soldier in the army of William the Conqueror, who first broke the ranks of the Anglo-Saxons at the battle of Hastings, A.D. 1066, is recorded on that occasion to have sung the song of Roland, one of the heroes of the romance of Charlemagne: and the manner in which this circumstance is mentioned, is such as to induce us to believe that the name of Roland was, before this exploit of Taillefer, familiar to the voice of fame¹.

Tarpin.

It was about the year 1100^m, the era of the accession of our Henry I, that a grand prose narrative was compiled in Latin, from the songs already existing on the subject of Roland, Oliver, and the other heroes of the imaginary war of Charlemagne against the

¹ Gaimar, apud De la Rue, p. 311. Malm. Lib. II, p. 101.

^m Voltaire, Histoire Générale, c. viii. Warton, English Poetry, Diss. I.

Saracens in Spain. This work purported to CHAP. III. be the production of Turpin, archbishop of Rheims in the time of that monarch, and was intended to be received as a history of his real exploits. It enumerates twelve peers of France, the contemporaries of this celebrated conqueror, whose accomplishments and exploits are largely insisted upon; and, among a variety of fictitious adventures ascribed to its hero, conducts him on a pilgrimage to the holy sepulchre at Jerusalem.

During the reign of the same English sovereign, but a little later, Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Benedictine monk, translated into Latin from a British or Armorican original, found in a convent of Brittany, and brought over into England by Walter Mapes, archdeacon of Oxford and himself a poet, a prose Chronicle of the Kings of Britain. This book exhibits a succession of the English sovereigns from the Trojan Brutus, their imaginary progenitor, and records exploits of the British Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, no less romantic and extraordinary than those of Charlemagne and

Geoffrey of
Mon-
mouth.

CHAP. III. his chivalrous associates. The twelve peers of France are also represented by Geoffrey as assisting at the coronation of the British warrior.—These two productions are regarded, with a considerable degree of propriety, as the two main sources of the romances of chivalry.

Wacc.

Proceeding forward then from them as the fountain-head of romance, which, as has been seen, they cannot be considered but under certain modifications, we may without much improbability regard Robert Wace, a native of the island of Jersey, and about thirty years younger than Geoffrey of Monmouth, as the father of the species of writing strictly so called, which may be defined a composition in verse containing the relation of heroic achievements and preternatural adventures. His first performance seems to have been a poem of several thousand lines in French octosyllabic verse, entitled *Le Brut d'Angleterre*, the materials of which are drawn from the fabulous History of Geoffrey of Monmouth. This poem was finished in the year 1155, and presented by its author to Eleanor,

the consort of our Henry II. Another celebrated work of the same author is the *Roman de Rou*, or poetical history of Rollo first duke of Normandy. He also wrote a continued series of romances on the successors of Rollo, which were at that time extremely popular, particularly those which treated of the adventures of *Richard sans peur* and *Robert le diable*. Wace had a rival in the favour of Henry II, named Benoit de St. More, who wrote a French poem of about twenty thousand verses on the Trojan war, the materials of which were taken from the pretended Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, and was employed by that prince on the topics which Wace has also treated, the poetical history of the dukes of Normandyⁿ. The favourite themes of the romance-writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were the Trojan war; the history of Alexander the Great; the adventures of Arthur and Charlemagne and the respective champions of these

Benoit de
St. More.

ⁿ Tyrwhit, Essay, note 47. De la Rue, apud Archæologia.

CHAP. III. princes; and the crusade : and at the same time that these subjects were treated in the vulgar tongue by such writers as have just been named, they were made the topics of a species of Latin epics, by Joseph of Exeter, Guillaume le Breton, and Gualtier de Chatillon, writers already mentioned, who composed in a period immediately subsequent to Wace and Benoit.

Plan, and
genius of
the ro-
mances.

The nature and plan of the greater part of the romances of this period are sufficiently known, and indeed have been consecrated and preserved to all future ages in the beautiful fictions of Ariosto and Tasso. A lady shut up in durance and distress was commonly to be relieved by the prowess of some redoubted knight. Her champion had not only to encounter every natural and human opposer: his antagonists were giants of the most incredible size and strength, hippogryphs and dragons, animals whose breath was fire and whose scales were iron: he was beleaguered with every species of enchantment and magical delusion; rocks were to be scaled, walls to be penetrated, and lakes to be swum; and at the

same time these rocks, walls and lakes, were CHAP. III.
the mere production of necromancy, brought
forth on the pressure of the instant by the art
of some mighty wizard. Adventures of this
sort were interwoven with the miraculous
feats of Christian warriors contending with
their impious Saracen adversaries, who were
also magicians. These were the tales with
which the youthful fancy of Chaucer was
fed; this was the visionary scenery by which
his genius was awakened; these were the
acts and personages on which his boyish
thoughts were at liberty to ruminate for ever.

CHAP. IV.

ESTABLISHMENTS AND PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAP. IV. **AFTER** the consideration of the scene in which a man has spent his boyish years, and the studies and modes of imagination to which his early attention has been directed, there is nothing which can be of more importance in moulding the youthful mind, than the religious sentiments which in our tender age have been communicated to us. As we have no direct information as to this particular in the education of Chaucer, it is fair to fix our ideas respecting him at the middle point, and to believe that he was brought up in all that institution which, relatively to the times when he was born, was regarded as seemly, decent and venerable, neither deviating into the excesses of libertinism on the one hand,

nor of a minute and slavish spirit of devotion on the other. If it should be thought that some of his lighter compositions are marked with no anxious regard to the laws of religion and decorum, there will still remain a considerable portion of his works which are stamped in no slight degree with the religious sentiments then in vogue, and his Testament of Love in particular, the offspring of adversity and imprisonment, when a man's early impressions of this sort are most apt to manifest themselves, is eminently serious, reverential and orthodox.

The religion of England in the times here treated of, was that of the holy apostolical Roman Catholic faith. It was about two hundred and fifty years before the birth of Chaucer that the church of Rome had gradually obtained that extraordinary ascendant and stability which have excited the astonishment of all subsequent ages. The eleventh century was marked with the establishment of those two cardinal dogmas, transubstantiation and the celibacy of the clergy; the one subduing all human sense and reason at the

Predominance and character of the Roman Catholic religion in the eleventh century.

CHAP. IV. foot of mystery and implicit faith; and the other creating to the sovereign pontiff an immense army of resolute adherents, dispersed through every region of Christendom, yet detached from all the ties of country, domestic affection and nature. This was the period in which the bishop of Rome openly assumed to himself the power of creating and deposing kings, of setting subjects free from the bond of allegiance, and of subjecting the most exalted personages to the basest and most abject penance. It was in the eleventh century that Henry IV. emperor of Germany waited three days, barefooted and bareheaded, in the month of January, in the outer court of the fortress of Canosa, expecting the clemency and forgiveness of its inhabitant, pope Gregory VII^a. It was about one hundred years afterward that Henry II, one of the ablest of the line of English monarchs, suffered flagellation from the hands of monks, at the tomb of Thomas of Becket, his rebel-

^a A.D. 1077.

lious subject, to expiate the offences he had committed against that distinguished martyr and against the holy see^b. The same era which was marked by the submission of the emperor, also put into the hands of the pope the transcendant prerogative of nominating to all vacant archbishoprics and bishoprics through every country which acknowledged the Catholic faith. Lastly, the eleventh century gave birth to those astonishing expeditions which were made for the recovery of the Holy Land ; and the closing year of the century witnessed the reduction of the city of Jerusalem to the obedience of the venerable head of the Catholic church.

The power of the church of Rome was in a considerable degree founded upon miracles, and it was necessary to the fascination which it at that time produced in the minds of its adherents, that all its enterprises should be attended with brilliancy and success. The recapture of Jerusalem therefore by the Sa-

Its decline.

^b A. D. 1174.

CHAP. IV. racens in the year 1187 may perhaps be considered as the first great blow which was struck against the fabric of superstition. This theatre of the consummation of the great sacrifice of the Christian doctrine was never recovered. The ardent devotees of a faith, the spirit of which it is to mix with all our concerns and modify all our dispositions, are excited to see the hand and the express providence of God in every event. To such persons many disasters and cross accidents may occur without shaking their confidence. They regard with humble submission the mysterious ways of heaven in all subordinate parts of the system; but they are scarcely prepared to encounter without a kind of murmuring and impious astonishment the miscarriage of what they deem to be the cause of God. In this view the crusades were a very impolitic project of the holy see. They were attended indeed with the utmost brilliancy and astonishment; they propagated a sentiment almost beyond the powers and the sphere of the human mind. But this very circumstance was pregnant with ruin: they

stretched too vehemently the religious nerve CHAP. IV.
 in the soul of man; and their ultimate defeat
 recoiled with fatal effect to plague their in-
 ventors. The claims of the popes too, by
 which they narrowed or annihilated the pre-
 rogatives of kings, are open to a similar
 censure. They played in many of these cases
 for too great a stake; they united too many
 interests and passions of princes and subjects
 in opposing their incroachments. Their
 power was too mighty and monstrous, and
 its tenure, being founded only in a particular
 train of thinking, too fragile, to give it a
 right to promise itself a very permanent
 duration. In the time of Chaucer it already
 tottered to its base.

But, however the hold which the Roman
 Catholic superstition had gained upon the
 minds of men might at this time be weak-
 ened, its external structure was undefaced
 and entire. It is the peculiar characteristic,
 I may add the peculiar beauty, of the Romish
 religion, that it so forcibly addresses itself to
 our senses, without losing sight of the im-
 mense advantage for giving permanence to a

Its policy
 in ad-
 dressing
 the
 senses.

CHAP. IV. system of religion, which is possessed by creeds, dogmas, and articles of faith. Religion is nothing, if it be not a sentiment and a feeling. What rests only in opinion and speculation, may be jargon, or may be philosophy, but can be neither piety toward God nor love to man. This truth was never more strikingly illustrated than in the history of the crusades. A man may be persuaded, by reading Grotius's treatise *Of the Truth of the Christian Religion*, or any other work of a similar nature, that the man Jesus was really put to death eighteen hundred years ago, and that, after having been committed to the grave, he was seen again a living man; yet this persuasion may produce no effect upon his temper and heart. Far different was the case, when the crusaders, after all their toils, and a difficult and obstinate siege, made themselves masters of Jerusalem by assault. They rushed toward the scene of the agony and death of their Saviour. They traced the venerable ground which had been hallowed by the tread of his feet. They saw the hill on which he died, the fragments of his

cross, the drops still fresh and visible of his CHAP. IV.
 sacred blood: they visited the tomb in which
 the Creator of the World once reposed among
 the dead. Their weapons, still reeking with
 blood, dropped from their trembling hands;
 the ferocity of a murderer was changed into
 the tenderness of a child: they kneeled before
 the tomb, kissed it with their lips, and bathed
 it with their tears; they poured out their souls
 in one united song of praise to the Redeemer;
 every one felt himself at this hour become a
 different man, and that a new spirit had taken
 its abode in his bosom.

The authors or improvers of the Romish
 religion were perfectly aware of the influence
 which the senses possess over the heart and
 the character. The buildings which they
 constructed for the purposes of public worship
 are exquisitely venerable. Their stained and
 painted windows admit only a "dim, re-
 ligious light." The magnificence of the fabric,
 its lofty and concave roof, the massy pillars,
 the extensive ailes, the splendid choirs, are
 all calculated to inspire the mind with re-
 ligious solemnity. Music, painting, images,

Religious
 edifices,
 proces-
 sions, and
 forms of
 worship.

CHAP. IV. decoration, nothing is omitted which may fill the soul with devotion. The uniform garb of the monks and nuns, their decent gestures, and the slowness of their procession, cannot but call off the most frivolous mind from the concerns of ordinary life. The solemn chaunt and the sublime anthem must compose and elevate the heart. The splendour of the altar, the brilliancy of the tapers, the smoke and fragrance of the incense, and the sacrifice, as is pretended, of God himself, which makes a part of every celebration of public worship, are powerful aids to the piety of every sincere devotee. He must have a heart more than commonly hardened, who could witness the performance of the Roman Catholic worship on any occasion of unusual solemnity, without feeling strongly moved.

Monasteries and convents.

Whatever effect is to be ascribed to such spectacles, was generated in ways infinitely more multiform in the time of Chaucer, than in any present country of the Christian world. Immense sums of money had been bequeathed by the devout and the timorous to pious and charitable purposes. Beside the splendour of

cathedrals and churches, not now easily to be CHAP. IV. conceived, the whole land was planted with monastic establishments. In London stood the mitred abbeyes of St. John and of Westminster, in addition to the convents of nuns, and the abodes of monks, and of friars, black, white and grey. Every time a man went from his house he met some of these persons, whose clothing told him that they had renounced the world, and that their lives were consecrated to God. The most ordinary spectacle which drew together the idle and the curious, was the celebration of some great festival, the performance of solemn masses for the dead, or the march of some religious procession, and the exhibition of the *Bon Dieu* to the eyes of an admiring populace. Henry VIII, the worse than Vandal of our English story, destroyed the habitations and the memorials which belonged to our ancient character, and exerted himself to the best of his power to make us forget we ever had ancestors. He who would picture to himself the religion of the time of Chaucer, must employ his fancy in rebuilding these ruined

CHAP. IV. edifices, restoring the violated shrines, and collecting again the scattered army of their guardians.

Masses for
the dead.

Beside every other circumstance belonging to the religion of this period, we are bound particularly to recollect two distinguishing articles of the Roman Catholic system; prayer for the dead, and the confession of sins. These are circumstances of the highest importance in modifying the characters and sentiments of mankind. Prayer for the dead is unfortunately liable to abuses, the most dangerous in increasing the power of the priest; and the most ridiculous, if we conceive their masses (which were often directed to be said to the end of time), and picture to ourselves the devout of a thousand years ago shoving and elbowing out, by the multiplicity of their donations of this sort, all posterity, and leaving scarcely a bead to be told to the memory of the man who yesterday expired. But, if we put these and other obvious abuses out of our minds, we shall probably confess that it is difficult to think of an institution more consonant to the genuine sentiments of human

nature, than that of masses for the dead. CHAP. IV.

When I have lost a dear friend and beloved associate, my friend is not dead to me. The course of nature may be abrupt, but true affection admits of no sudden breaks. I still see my friend ; I still talk to him. I consult him in every arduous question ; I study in every difficult proceeding to mould my conduct to his inclination and pleasure. Whatever assists this beautiful propensity of the mind, will be dear to every feeling heart. In saying masses for the dead, I sympathise with my friend. I believe that he is anxious for his salvation ; I utter the language of my anxiety. I believe that he is passing through a period of trial and purification ; I also am sad. It appears as if he were placed beyond the reach of my kind offices ; this solemnity once again restores to me the opportunity of aiding him. The world is busy and elaborate to tear him from my recollection ; the hour of this mass revives the thought of him in its tenderest and most awful form. My senses are mortified that they can no longer behold the object of their cherished gratification ;

CHAP. IV. but this disadvantage is mitigated, by a scene of which my friend is the principle and essence, presented to my senses.

Auricular
confes-
sion.

The practice of auricular confession is exposed to some of the same objections as masses for the dead, and is connected with many not less conspicuous advantages. There is no more restless and unappeasable propensity of the mind than the love of communication, the desire to pour out our soul in the ear of a confidant and a friend. There is no more laudable check upon the moral errors and deviations of our nature, than the persuasion that what we perpetrate of base, sinister and disgraceful, we shall not be allowed to conceal. Moralists have recommended to us that, in cases of trial and temptation, we should imagine Cato, some awful and upright judge of virtue, the witness of our actions; and that we should not dare to do what he would disapprove. Devout men have pressed the continued recollection of the omnipresence of an all-perfect being. But these expedients are inadequate to the end they are proposed to answer. The first

consists of an ingenious effort of the fancy, CHAP. IV. which we may sometimes, but cannot always, be prepared to make. The second depends upon the abstruse and obscure image we may frame of a being, who, thus represented, is too unlike ourselves to be of sufficient and uniform operation upon our conduct. The Romish religion, in the article here mentioned, solves our difficulties, and saves us the endless search after an associate and an equal in whom we may usefully repose our confidence. It directs us to some man, venerable by character, and by profession devoted to the cure and relief of human frailties. To do justice to the original and pure notion of the benefits of auricular confession, we must suppose the spiritual father really to be all that the office he undertakes requires him to be. He has with his penitent no rival passions nor contending interests. He is a being of a different sphere, and his thoughts employed about widely different objects. He has with the person he hears, so much of a common nature, and no more, as should lead him to sympathise with his pains, and com-

CHAP. IV.

passionate his misfortunes. In this case we have many of the advantages of having a living man before us to fix our attention and satisfy our communicative spirit, combined with those of a superior nature which appears to us inaccessible to weakness and folly. We gain a friend to whom we are sacredly bound to tell the little story of our doubts and anxieties, who hears us with interest and fatherly affection, who judges us uprightly, who advises us with an enlightened and elevated mind, who frees us from the load of undivulged sin, and enables us to go forward with a chaste heart and a purified conscience. There is nothing more allied to the barbarous and savage character, than sullenness, concealment and reserve. There is nothing which operates more powerfully to mollify and humanise the heart, than the habit of confessing all our actions, and concealing none of our weaknesses and absurdities.

Days of ab-
stinence.

Several other circumstances in the Roman Catholic religion, as it was practised in the fourteenth century, co-operated with those which have just been mentioned, to give it

a powerful ascendancy over the mind, and CHAP. IV.
to turn upon it a continual recollection. One
of these is to be found in the fasts and ab-
stinences of the church. These were no
doubt so mitigated as scarcely to endanger
any alarming consequences to the life or
health of the true believer. But they at
least interfered, in some cases to regulate the
diet, and in others to delay the hours of cus-
tomary refection. One hundred and seventy-
six days (I know not whether this catalogue
is complete) may easily be reckoned up in the
calendar, which were modified by directions
of this sort. Thus religion in its most pal-
pable form was continually protruded to the
view, and gained entrance into every family
and house.

Again: extreme unction is one of the
seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic re-
ligion. A few days ago a person of this
persuasion paid me a visit, and in the course
of conversation informed me, that his near
kinsman lay at the point of death, that he
would be buried in a week, and that after the
hurry of that affair was over he would call

Extreme
unction.

CHAP. IV. upon me again. I was surprised at the precision, as well as the apathy, with which my visitor expressed himself, and asked how he was enabled to regard this business as entirely arranged. He replied that he had no doubt of the matter, and that the physician had informed the dying man he had only twenty-four hours left, in which to arrange his worldly affairs and the concerns of his soul. This was to me new matter of astonishment: nothing can be more obvious than that to inform an expiring man that he is at the point of death, partakes something of the nature of administering to him a dose of poison. It is equally clear that, in the view of any rational religion, it is the great scope of a man's moral life, the propensities which have accompanied him through existence, and the way in which he has conducted himself in its various relations, that must decide upon his acceptance or condemnation with his unerring judge.

But such are not the modes, nor such the temper of the Roman Catholic faith. The preparation for death is one of its foremost injunctions. The Host, that is, the true and

very body of his redeemer, is conducted in CHAP. IV. state to the dying man's house, conveyed to his chamber, and placed upon his parched and fevered tongue; he is anointed with holy oil; and, after a thousand awful ceremonies, dismissed upon his dark and mysterious voyage. Every thing is sedulously employed to demonstrate that he is a naked and wretched creature about to stand before the tribunal of an austere and rigorous judge; and that his blameless life, his undaunted integrity, his proud honour, and his generous exertions for the welfare of others, will all of them little avail him on this tremendous and heart-appalling occasion. The chamber of the dying man is the toilet of his immortal soul, at which it must be delicately and splendidly attired, before it presumes to enter the courts of the king of heaven. This scene perhaps produces a stronger effect upon the spectators than upon the object for whom it is performed.

Death, in the eye of sobriety and reason, is an inevitable accident, of which we ought not to make too anxious an account. "Live

CHAP. IV. well," would be the recommendation of the enlightened moralist ; " and die as you can. It is in all cases a scene of debility and pain, in which human nature appears in its humblest and most mortifying aspect. But it is not much. Let not the thought of death taint all the bewitching pleasures, and all the generous and heroical adventure of life."

The Roman Catholic doctrine on the topic of a Christian's death-bed, was perhaps a no less fruitful source of pusillanimity, than the lessons of chivalry and romance were of gallantry and enterprise. The noblest and most valorous knight often died with a cowl on his head, and a hair-shirt bound about his languid frame. The priest eloquently declaimed to him on his manifold and unexpiated crimes done in his days of nature. He saw nothing before him at the best but purging fires, and a tedious and melancholy train of salutary tortures. To abridge and soften these, he often bequeathed no inconsiderable part of his worldly fortune. Achilles, in the retreat of the Pagan dead, is made by Homer passionately to declare how willingly

he would change his state for that of the CHAP. IV.
 meanest plough-boy who is cheered by the
 genial beams of the sun^c: with much more
 reason might this exclamation be adopted by
 a person entering upon the Romish purga-
 tory. The pusillanimous spirit produced by
 these tenets is clearly to be seen on many
 occasions by an attentive reader in the works
 of Chaucer; and I believe the same remark
 might be extended to every author who wrote
 under the reign of this superstition.

Such may be conceived to have been the
 general character and appearance of the re-
 ligious institutions of England in the four-
 teenth century. There are other circumstances,
 which are calculated to bring the subject more
 immediately home to the period of Chaucer's
 life we are here considering. It is a prin-
 cipal feature of the Roman Catholic system,
 to attempt to make profound and indelible
 impressions upon the minds of its disciples
 at a very early age. They soon come to be

Period of
 the first
 confes-
 sion.

^c Odyss. Lib. XI.

CHAP. IV. considered as integral members of the church of Christ, and various ceremonies are employed to impress upon them the conviction that they are so. The ecclesiastical rule of order is, that they are to resort to confession as soon as they may be supposed capable of clearly distinguishing between good and evil; and this is ordinarily fixed at the age of seven years. But this rule is not acted on but with considerable relaxation. Where the parents are scrupulous and punctilious in matters of religion, it may be supposed to be adhered to with the utmost minuteness. But in the case of Chaucer, a layman, probably the son of a merchant, and whose parents, as we have no particular information concerning them, we are bound to take at a sort of middle standard, it is not probable that he was so early enjoined to engage in this sacramental solemnity. In every case, confession is always made previously to the novice's partaking of his first communion, a ceremony almost universally practised about the age of thirteen or fourteen years.

All these circumstances naturally involve

with them the visit of the priest, who is to CHAP. IV. observe, as to the younger members of the family, the progress of their comprehension, the degree in which they have been made partakers of religious instruction, and the state of preparation in which they may be supposed to be for admission to the sacraments of the church. Chaucer, while a boy, was probably a witness, and was not altogether excluded from being made a subject, of these visits. If we picture him to ourselves, at the earliest or the latest period above assigned for confession, placed on his knees before a grave and venerable personage of sad and sober attire, enjoined to recollect his offences against God and the wanderings of his thoughts, reminded of the solemn judgment which hereafter awaits him, exhorted to penitence, reformation and devotion, and terrified and encouraged by turns as the priest shall think fit to set before him the threatenings or the promises of his heavenly father, we shall then have no very inadequate idea of the impressions which, judging from general reasonings, probably, and from the hints afforded

CHAP. IV.

in various parts of his writings, certainly, were made upon the poet's youthful mind.

Festival of
the first
commu-
nion.

If however the sacrament of confession has a certain tendency to lead the mind to sadness and depression, the festival of the first communion is happily calculated to associate the young man's ideas of religion with sentiments of hilarity, beneficence and a reasonable gaiety. This is a period which occurs in the Romish church only once in a year. It is always celebrated in the month of May, when nature puts on her most pleasing attire, when the fields are clothed in all their freshness, and the whole animal creation is restored to cheerfulness and vigour. A procession is formed, which gives gaiety and life to the city or quarter in which it appears. The most sacred symbols of religion are brought forth, surrounded by a train of their chosen defenders and ministers; the young communicants, who are numerous and of both sexes, are drawn forth in bands, and preceded by banners; they proceed from church to church through the city or town where the festival is held; and a sum of money is collected from among

them, with which the indigent are relieved, CHAP. IV.
and with which they sometimes proceed to
release the unfortunate debtor from prison.
On this occasion the accidental distinctions
of society are partially suspended; and the
poorest are invited to regale themselves be-
neath the roofs of the parents of the richer
communicants. After a day thus spent in
acts of benevolence, charity and devotion,
the last march of the procession is performed
by the light of torches, and the whole is
concluded with that participation of the body
of Christ which was the object of the festival.
Certainly religion never appears more amiable
than when thus blended with gay and cheerful
ideas; nor can hilarity perhaps ever be shown
to greater advantage than when chastened by
a sense of the frailty of our nature, and the
solemn obligation of our duties.

The rite of confirmation, according to the Confirma-
tion.
Roman Catholic discipline, is always sub-
sequent, and never prior, to the first com-
munion.

CHAP. V.

DIVERSIONS OF OUR ANCESTORS IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.—THE MINSTRELS.—VARIETY OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

CHAP. V. **N**EXT after the studies, the literary compositions, and the religion of any period, there is no cause which more powerfully tends to modify the youthful mind, than the species of amusements which may chance to be prevalent.

The minstrels.

A principal source of the amusements which distinguished the age of Chaucer, arose from a class of men commonly known by the appellation of minstrels.

Successive revolutions of the minstrel profession.

These have already been mentioned. They were the direct successors of the bards, the scalds, and the harpers of the ancient Britons, Saxons and Danes.

There is no reason to doubt that the per-

sons who exercised these successive pro-
fessions, originally composed the words and
the music of the pieces they performed.
They united in their own persons the cha-
racters of poet, musical composer, and per-
former of vocal and instrumental music.

The further we extend our enquiries into
the remotest period of their existence, with
the more veneration do we find them to have
been regarded. The bards who flourished The bard.
in this island in the druidical times, con-
stituted a part of the religious hierarchy;
and their performances were probably never
degraded by being brought forward on pro-
fane and ordinary occasions. The scalds, The scald.
though perhaps they were not considered
precisely as priests, were viewed in some
manner as sacred; and persons invested with
this character passed from province to pro-
vince, from country to country, and between
the encampments of hostile armies, in abso-
lute security. There was this difference
however between the scalds and the min-
strels of the remotest periods on the one
hand, and the bards on the other, that while

CHAP. V. the latter only officiated on religious occasions and the most important solemnities, the former were itinerant, frequented the halls of princes and barons, and derived their subsistence from the spontaneous bounty of those whom they sought to entertain.

Another point of degeneracy which we may remark in the itinerant poets and musicians even before the Norman conquest, is to be found in the different end they sometimes proposed to themselves in their performances. The bard was a serious, as well as a sacred, character. So was the scald of the north, when Regner Lodbrog composed his Funeral Hymn, and Egil sung the stanzas denominated his Ransom^a. The object of their effusions was to express the heroic sentiments of their souls, and to inspire into their hearers the love of piety or virtue. Their successors in the latest periods of the Anglo-Saxon government by no means dis-

^a Mallet, Introduction à l'Histoire de Dannemarc, tom. II. Blair, Dissertation on Ossian. Henry, Book II, chap. 5.

carded this feature of their ancient character ; CHAP. V.
 but they occasionally condescended to engage
 in a humbler project, to aim at the amusement
 of their hearers, and for this purpose to lay
 aside the solemnity and gravity of their
 strains. To the tragic vein of their ancestors
 they added a comic vein of their own. This
 is strongly marked to us by the word prin-
 cipally employed by the Saxons to de-
 nominate their profession. They were called
 gleemen^b. This name they derived from a
 primitive word in their language [gleeg],
 originally signifying music. But, as their art
 became varied in its object, the word by
 which they were denominated insensibly
 changed its meaning ; and glee came to
 signify *bilarity, sport, laughter*, as at this day.
 This is sufficiently conformable to what has
 universally been observed of the progress of
 human society. The savage is a grave cha-
 racter ; his mode of existence is too insecure,

The glee-
man.

^b This word, with its *radix*, and various collateral descendants, is copiously illustrated by Percy, Essay on Minstrels, note I.

CHAP. V. and he is too often called upon for sudden and unforeseen exertion, not to maintain in him inflexibly this temper of mind. The barbarian, in proportion as he recedes from this primitive condition of man, feels himself more secure and at his ease, dismisses his gloom, and is at leisure to cultivate a sort of rude vein of jocularity and sport.

A further criterion, distinguishing the period when the itinerant musician was held in the highest honour, from the time of his degeneracy, seems to be, that in the earliest times persons of this class travelled for the most part singly, and more lately in companies. Anlaff king of the Danes came alone into the camp of Athelstan the Saxon monarch^c. The musician was even sometimes followed by an attendant who bore his harp. It was under this appearance that Alfred the Great penetrated into the Danish camp^d. This style is similar to that which presents

^c Malmesbury, Lib. II, cap. 6.

^d Malmesbury, Lib. II, cap. 4. Ingulphus, Scriptores post Bedam, p. 869.

itself in the earliest times of the Greeks. It CHAP. V.
is thus that we conceive Homer to have recited his poems; and it is thus that Homer describes the bard of king Alcinous.

When literature began to grow more common, one of the first effects was to detach in a great measure the character of the poet from that of the reciter of verses. The authors of almost all the old romances now subsisting were monks. They were written however for the purpose of being recited to music; and of consequence, while the monk was the author, the itinerant musician was the performer only. Professors of this class therefore, having lost the most sacred part of their character, were glad to associate themselves into bands, and to offer their joint powers of amusement to such as were willing to give them audience.

The name of minstrel in England is posterior to the Norman conquest; and it may be doubted whether persons of this denomination, in opposition to the scalds and harpers of our remoter ancestors, ever appeared but in this associated manner. Even before the

CHAP. V. invasion of king William, we meet with them on the continent in this form. It is recorded of the emperor Henry III, that, at his marriage with Agnes de Poitou in 1044, he “suffered an infinite multitude of minstrels [*infinitam histrionum et jocularum multitudinem*] to go away sad and fasting, having refused to bestow upon them either gifts or provisions^e.” A similar remark, as to the point we are treating of, occurs in an ancient historian, respecting the year 1185^f.

Occupations
and arts
culti-
vated by
the min-
strels.

The character of the minstrel therefore, at least when he appeared under this form, was infinitely more complicated than that of the bard or the scald, his predecessors. We may distinctly trace in him the different accomplishments of a player upon some musical instrument, a vocal performer, a dancer, a posture-master, a jester, a professor of legerdemain, and a sorcerer. We may easily conceive, in the twelfth and thirteenth cen-

^e Chronic. Vitziburg. apud Percy, note F.

^f Rigordus de Gestis Philippi Aug. apud Du Cange, Gloss. Lat. sub voc. Ministelli.

turies, when the means of amusement in-
 vented by our ancestors were as yet so limited,
 with what welcome a cheerful and numerous
 party of persons, possessing such various
 powers of entertainment and surprise, was
 received in the halls of the great, and the
 fairs and places of assembly resorted to by
 the inferior classes.

That they played on certain musical instru-
 ments is a point which needs not to be insisted
 upon. This is obviously the first idea annexed
 to the term minstrel by the historians and
 miscellaneous writers their contemporaries.

1. Instru-
 mental
 music.

That they sung certain poetical compo-
 sitions to the accord of their harps is almost
 equally clear. Nearly all our old ballads and
 romances were composed to be sung by the
 minstrels. Thus Chaucer, in his voluminous
 production entitled *Troilus and Creseide*, ad-
 dressing his work, says,

2. Singing.

So praie I God that none miswrité the,
 Ne the misse-metre, for defaute of tonge,
 And, redde where so thou be, *or ellés songe*,
 That thou be understonde God I beseche.

B. v, ver. 1794.

CHAP. V. Edward IV. in 1469 granted a charter to his minstrels, which is extant, and, among the duties required of them, one which is specified is, that they are to “sing^g, in the king’s chapel and the chapel of St. Paul’s cathedral, for the souls of the king and queen, so long as they live, and when they shall be no more.”

In the songs of the minstrels, perhaps more than in any other of their performances, they still preserved that dignity and elevation of sentiment which descended to them from the bards and scalds of a remoter antiquity. Many of their songs and tales indeed were of a lighter kind, and intended to promote hilarity. They certainly did not disdain the assistance of buffoonery and scurrile mirth. But it is impossible to look into the poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, without perceiving that much of it is descriptive of heroic actions, impregnated with generous sentiment, and calculated to inspire a gallant

* Rymer, Foedera, Tom. XI, 9 Edv. 4, Apr. 24. The word in the patent is *exorare*; but, as applied to the minstrels, it cannot be doubted that the above is the right translation.

and noble spirit of beneficence and adventure. CHA P. V.

Accordingly, those writers who speak of them with the greatest severity yet acknowledge, that “ they frequently celebrated the deeds of illustrious men and heroes, either relating them in a style of perspicuous and pleasant discourse, or singing them in a well-modulated voice to the sound of their harps, that so they might rouse the lords and noble personages who were the auditors of their amusements, to the practice of virtue, and the imitation of the purest examples : such as Tacitus tells us was the office of the bards among the ancient Gauls.

*Qui veut avoir renom des bons et des vaillans,
Il doit aler souvent à la pluie et au champs,
Et estre en la bataille, ainsy que fu Rollans,
Les Quatre Fils Haimon, et Charlon li plus grans,
Li Dus Lions de Bourges, et Guion de Connans,
Perceval li Galois, Lancelot, et Tristans,
Alixandres, Artus, Godefroy li sachans :
De quoy cils menestriers font les nobles romans^h.”*

^h Anonym. apud Du Cange, sub voc. Ministelli.

CHAP. V.

3. Dancing.

That dancing was one of the accomplishments exhibited by the minstrels, is evident from various testimonies. In a poem of Lydgate, entitled *Reson and Sensualite*, he professes to speak

Of all maner mynstralcy
That any man kan specifye,

and in his enumeration observes,

Ffor there were rotys of Almayne,
And eke of Arragon and Spayne,
Songés, stampés and eke *daunces*,
Divers plente of plesauncesⁱ.

Fauchet also, in explaining what were the *trouverres* and *jongleurs* of France, says, "The great lords before whom they performed, were accustomed to give them distinguished rewards, and even garments from their own wardrobe, which they did not fail to exhibit at other courts, with the hope of exciting those who saw them to acts of similar

ⁱ Bibliotheca Bodleiana, apud Warton, Vol. II, Sect. x.

liberality: a practice which continued a long CHAP. V.
time, for I myself remember to have seen
Martin Baraton (formerly an *old minstrel* of
Orleans), who at festivals and marriages, beat
upon a tabourin of silver, ornamented also
with little plates of silver, upon which were
engraved the arms of such persons as he had
taught to dance ^k."

A further accomplishment studied by the
minstrels was the skill of a posture-master.
Thus Joinville in his Life of St. Louis:
"With the prince there came three *minstrels*
of Armenia, having three horns at their belts.
When they began to blow, you would have
vowed that it was the voice of a swan, so rich
and sweet was the melody they uttered. They
also performed three wonderful leaps; and,
placing a towel under their feet, turned round
in a very extraordinary manner; the two first
held their heads averted, &c. ^l"

4. Tum-
bling.

The minstrels also studied, with a view to

5. Jesting.

^k Fauchet, Recueil de l'Origine de la Langue et Poesie
Françoise, Liv. I, ch. 8.

^l Vid. Percy, note B.

CHAP. V. the amusement of the persons whose houses they frequented, the art of showing themselves ready in various ingenious gibes and mockeries, suggested by such occasions as might offer. Thus in a poem of Adam Davie, who flourished about the year 1312, we have

Merry it is in halle to here the harpe,
The minstrelles synge, the jogelours carpe^m.

and in William of Nassyngton, about 1480, in the commencement of a religious treatise,

I warne you furst at the' begynninge,
That I will make no vain carpinge
Of dedes of armes ne of amours,
As dus mynstrellés and jestours,
That makes carpinge in many a place, &c.ⁿ

6. Leger-
demain.

The minstrels also practised the art of leger-demain. This seems sufficiently clear from the name of *jongleur*, *jogeler*, *jugleur*, by which they were occasionally known, and

^m Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

ⁿ Tyrwhit, Canterbury Tales, note on ver. 13775.

which from them has gradually come to be CHAP. V. appropriated to those who are skilful in slight-of-hand. Something nearly allied to this is described by Chaucer in the Romaunt of the Rose.

There was many a timbestere,
And sailours that, I dare well swere
Ycouthe ° hir crafte full parfitly.
The timbres up full subtilly
Thei casten, and hent ° hem full oft
Upon a finger faire and soft,
That they ne failed never mo.

Ver. 769.

Tricks of a nature similar to this are of a very ancient date. Taillefer, the gallant warrior who first broke the ranks of the Saxon army at the battle of Hastings, and who, by the circumstance of being recorded as singing on that occasion the Song of Roland, has been made a name of importance in the history of literature and art, is described by his

° their.

° them.

CHAP. V. poetical historian as, previously to the commencement of the action, casting his spear three times into the air, and catching it as often by the point; after which he threw it into the midst of the enemy, and, drawing his sword, tossed it aloft as many times as he had done his spear, catching it again with such dexterity that those who looked on attributed his feats to the power of enchantment^a. Having thus in the hearing of the whole army chanted the song of victory, and in their sight performed his tricks of agility and muscular precision, he rushed into the thickest ranks of the hostile squadrons, and, dealing death on every side, became himself the voluntary sacrifice which was to precede the triumph, fixing his countrymen for ever in the empire of the island they invaded.

Dexterities of the sort here mentioned may even be traced to a period more remote than that of Taillefer. In a manuscript of the

^a Gaimar, apud Strutt, Sports and Pastimes of the People of England, B. III, chap. iii.

Psalms of David, which is supposed to have CHAP. V.
 been written in England, and has been at-
 tributed to the times of the Saxons, there is
 an illuminated frontispiece, in which, among
 several figures, one is introduced in the act of
 keeping up three balls with his right hand,
 and three knives with his left, at the same
 time in the air^r.

The skill of the minstrels in the art of 7. Enchant-
ment.
 sorcery and pretended enchantments likewise,
 appears from Chaucer and other contemporary
 writers to have been by no means incon-
 siderable. This species of illusion is twice
 spoken of in the Canterbury Tales. The first
 instance occurs in the Friar's Tale. A sum-
 moner meets a fiend, and, expressing some
 surprise that he finds him exactly in human
 form, the fiend replies,

Nay certainly, in helle ther have we none,
 (no determinate figure)

But whan us liketh we can take us one,
 Or ellés make you wene that we ben shape
 Somtimé like a man, or like an ape;

^r Strutt, ubi supra.

CHAP. V.

Or like an angel can I ride or go :
 It is no wonder thing though it be so,
 A lousy jogelour can deceiven the,
 And pardé yet ^s can I more craft than he.

Ver. 7043, Tyrwhit's Edition.

A more copious description of this species of illusion occurs in the Franklin's Tale.

Doun of his hors Aurelius light anon,
 And forth with this magicien is gon
 Home to his hous, and made ^t hem wel at ese,
 Hem lackéd no vitaille that might hem plese.
 So wel arraiéd hous as ther was one,
 Aurelius in his lif saw never none.

He shewéd him, ^u or they went to soupere,
 Forestés, parkés, ful of wildé dere;
 Ther saw he hartés with ^v hir hornés hie,
 The gretest that were ever sene with eie;
 He saw of hem an hundred slain with houndes,
 And som with arwes blede of bitter woundes;
 Hé saw, whan voided were the wildé dere,
 Thise fauconers upon a faire rivere,
 That with ^v hir haukés han the heron slain.

^w Tho saw he knightés justen in a plain :

^s know. ^t them. ^u ere. ^v their. ^w Then.

And after this he did him ^x swiche plesance, CHAP. V.

That he him shew'd his lady on a dance,

On which himselven dancéd, as him thought.

And whan this maister, that this magike
wrought,

Saw it was time, he clapp'd his hondés two,

And farewel, al the revel is ago.

And yet ^y remued they ne'er out of the hous,

While they saw all thise sightés merveillous,

But in his studie, ther his bokés be,

They saten still, and no wight but they thre.

Ver. 11495.

The description given by sir John Mandeville, the traveller, and contemporary of Chaucer, of the magic exhibited before the khan of Tartary, is so strikingly similar to this, as to afford a strong presumption that exhibitions, where something of this kind was attempted, were the practice of the age, and not the offspring of the poet's particular fancy.

“ And than comen Jogulours and Enchantoures that don many marvaylles: for they maken to come in the ayr the sonne and the mone, be seminge, to every mannes sight.

^x such.

^y removed.

CHAP. V. And after they maken the nyght so derk, that no man may see no thing. And aftre they maken the day to come ayen fair and plesant with bright sonne to every mannes sight. And than they bringen in daunces of the fairest damyselles of the world and richest arrayed. And aftre they maken to comen in other damyselles, bringinge coupes of gold, fulle of mylk of dyverse bestes, and yeven drynke to lordes and to ladyes. And than they make knyghtes to jousten in armes fulle lustyly; and they rennen togidre a gret random; and they frusschen togidere fulle fiercely; and they breken here speres so rudely, that the tronchouns flen in sprotes and peces alle aboute the halle. And than they make to come in huntyng for the hert and for the boor, with houndes renning with open mouthe. And many other thinges they don be craft of hir enchauntementes, that it is marveyle for to see." And elsewhere the traveller remarks, "and wher it be by craft or by nygromancye, I wot nere²."

² Tyrwhit, Canterbury Tales, note on ver. 11453.

A further talent pretended to by the minstrels, for, as they subsisted by their profession, they slighted no means of recommending themselves to the great or to the multitude, was that of the soothsayer and the apothecary. This is proved by a narrative preserved by Leland, the antiquary, respecting Fulco Guarine, an ancient baron, against whom king John entertained a deadly animosity^a. The king dispossessed him of his lands, and Fulco was obliged to fly from place to place, attended by a band of resolute followers, and thus to save himself from the effects of the king's displeasure. Among various expedients employed by him on this occasion, it is related of him that he "resortid to one John of Raumpayne, a sothsayer, and jocular, and minstrelle, and made hym his spy to Morice at Whittington," the estate of Fulco, but which king John had granted, by a patent under the broad seal, to this Morice. The consequence of Raumpayne's information

CHAP. V.

8. Prophecy and the science of drugs.

^a Leland, Collectanea, Tom. I, p. 261, et seq.

CHAP. V. was, that “Fulco and his bretherne laide waite for Morice as he went toward Salesbyri; and Fulco ther wounded hym; and Bracy cut off Morice hedde.” This exploit gained to Fulco the possession of his castle; but, some time after, “syr Bracy was sore woundid, and token, and brought by Audeleghe to king John.” In this situation Raumpayne was again of use. He “founde the meanes to caste them that kepte Bracy into a deadely slepe, and so he and Bracy cam to Fulco to Whittington.”

The minstrels a numerous body of men.

As the minstrels appear ordinarily to have visited places of public resort and the houses of the great in companies, it will easily be supposed that the whole body of persons exercising this profession in England was extremely numerous. A curious example of this occurs in the history of the family of Dutton. “Hugh the first earl of Chester, in his charter of foundation of St. Werburg’s Abbey in that city, had granted such a privilege to those who should come to Chester fair, that they should not be then apprehended for theft or any other misdemeanor, except

the crime were committed during the fair. CHAP. V.

This special protection, occasioning a multitude of loose people to resort to that fair, was afterwards of signal benefit to one of his successors. For Ranulph the last earl of Chester, marching into Wales with a slender attendance, [*circa* 1212] was constrained to retire to his castle of Rothelan (or Rhuydland), to which the Welsh forthwith laid siege. In this distress he sent for help to the lord de Lacy constable of Chester: ‘ Who, making use of the minstrells of all sorts then met at Chester fair; by the allurements of their musick got together a vast number of such loose people as, by reason of the before specified priviledge, were then in that city; whom he forthwith sent under the conduct of Dutton (his steward),’ a gallant youth, who was also his son-in-law. The Welsh alarmed at the approach of this rabble, supposing them to be a regular body of armed and disciplined veterans, instantly raised the siege and retired^b.” For this

^b Dugdale, apud Percy, Sect. iv.

CHAP. V. service the jurisdiction of the minstrels within that district was granted to the representative of the name of Dutton, and continued in that family for several ages.

formed into
corporations or
guilds.

In this instance then we have an example of a sort of incorporation or commonwealth of minstrels; and indeed it was not to be supposed that so numerous an order of men could remain altogether without subordination and discipline. Under many successive kings of England from Henry I, we find mention of a court-minstrel^c. Blondel, who discovered Richard I. in his captivity, stood in this relation to that monarch^c; and it was the harper, or minstrel, of Edward I, who stands on record for his excessive zeal, when that prince, in his crusade to the Holy Land, was struck with the poisoned knife^d. Henry V, and other English monarchs, had a number of minstrels regularly in their pay, and these, being formed into a company, had certain officers over them, who are variously styled the king, the

^c Percy, Sect. iv.

^d Hemingford, apud ditto, Sect. v.

marshal, and the sergeant of the minstrels^e. CHAP. V.

The great English nobility imitated their sovereigns, in the patronage and protection they extended to this order of men^f.

Much light may be derived in the history of the minstrels from the consideration of the various names by which they are designated among our ancient historians and miscellaneous writers. Minstrel has been deduced with sufficient probability from *minister*, a servant, *quasi ministerellus*, a little or inferior servant, and is variously written *ministellus*, *ministrellus*, *ministrallus*, *menesterellus*, &c.^g They are also frequently spoken of by the epithet *joculator*, which term has been varied into *juglator*, *joueur*, *jongleur* and *jogeler*^h. *Mimus* and *bistris* are likewise names by which they are described by the Latin writers of the middle agesⁱ. *Harlot* is also a term which is applied to them in the charter granting jurisdiction over them to the family of Dutton^k;

Variety of names by which they are designated.

^e Percy, Sect. v.

^f ditto, Sect. vi.

^g Percy, Notes A, B, N, A 2.

^h Blount, apud Percy, Sect. iv.

CHAP. V. and it is probably in this sense that the word is used by Chaucer in the Romaunt of the Rose, where the god of love is described as appointing False-semblant his king of harlotsⁱ: the corresponding term in his French original is "*roy des ribaulx*^k."

Nothing can be more evident to any careful examiner of the contemporary writers, than that all this variety of terms is employed to express the same thing. In the story of Alfred penetrating into the Danish camp, the expression used by Ingulphus is "*rex—fingens se esse jocularorem*." And William of Malmesbury, describing the same fact, says, "*sub specie mimi,—ut joculariæ professor artis*." Indeed the word *joculator* is a literal translation of the Saxon term Glee-man: and this by the way, as both Ingulphus and Malmesbury wrote a short time after the conquest, furnishes a strong presumptive proof how soon the term Glee, as applied to the exhibitions of the minstrels, acquired the sense

ⁱ ver. 6068.

^k ver. 11559.

which it continues to bear. In like manner CHAP. V.
 John of Salisbury, after having described the
 minstrels by every epithet with which his
 memory could furnish him, “ *mimi, salii vel
 saliares, balatrones, æmiliani, gladiatores, pa-
 læstritæ, gignadii*¹, *præstigiatores, malefici*,”
 sums them up under one comprehensive
 term, “ *tota joculatorum scæna*^m.” In the
 authorities above cited, Leland’s old English
 book of the Gestes of Guarine styles John
 of Raumpayne, “ a sothsayer, and *jocular*,
 and *minstrelle* :” and the narrator of the
 story of Dutton, as if labouring in his ex-
 pression under the consciousness of the
 variety of arts to which the minstrels de-
 voted themselves, describes the multitude of
 them who resorted to Chester fair in the
 time of king John, by the phrase, “ minstrels
 of all sorts.” Indeed there would be no end
 in multiplying quotations from the ancient

¹ forte *gymnasii*.

^m De Nugis Curialium, Lib. I, cap. 8.

CHAP. V. writers to prove that the minstrels were not more numerous as individuals, than they were multifarious in the accomplishments they cultivated.

CHAP. VI.

ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH STAGE.—PROFANE DRAMAS.—MIRACLE PLAYS.—PAGEANTS.—MYSTERIES.—MASKS.

BUT, among these accomplishments of the minstrels one has purposely been reserved, because it seems to have been almost universally overlooked by the ingenious writers who have undertaken to perpetuate their memory, and, by those who have just touched upon it, by no means insisted upon as its importance seems to deserve; and because it tends to elucidate a very important branch of English literature, the early history of our theatre. It will probably be found on a mature investigation, that the minstrels were the first composers and representers of dramatic performances in England.

CHAP. VI.
The min-
strels our
first dra-
matists.

It is not indeed extraordinary that this

CHAP. VI. circumstance should be so little adverted to, as no one of their productions of this sort appears to have come down to us, as we are ignorant of the very names of the pieces and the subjects of which they treated, and as we are left to collect all that can now be known concerning them from indirect inferences and general circumstances.

One of the first particulars which might well lead us to some suspicion of the truth of the proposition here started consists in the names by which the professors of the minstrel art are frequently described by the Latin writers of the twelfth century, *bistriones* and *mimi*. These writers, as has already appeared, were by no means incompetent judges of language, and ought not to be believed to have employed appellations of this sort without fully adverting to their meaning.

proved from
John of
Salisbury.
bury.

But, if we look more narrowly into these writers with a view of clearing the doubt here suggested, we shall find strong reason to confirm us in the opinion that, from the time of the retreat of the Romans, the minstrels were the first body of actors in England,

No author can be a more competent witness CHAP. VI.
in this point than John of Salisbury, whether
we consider the degree of intelligence and
elegance displayed in his writings, or the time
in which he lived, he having been born and
died in the twelfth century. As the fact here
stated is of considerable importance, it may
be worth our while to examine the assertions
advanced by this author, with some degree of
minuteness.

John of Salisbury, who was a monk of
Canterbury, speaks, like all the monastic
writers, with the utmost contempt and ab-
horrence of the order of minstrels. He has
particularly treated of the most obvious topics
respecting them in the sixth, seventh and
eighth chapters of the first book of his treatise
entitled *Policraticus, De Nugis Curialium*.
We will enter into an abstract of each of these
chapters.

The title of the sixth chapter is, *De
musica, et instrumentis, et modis, et fructu
eorum*. [Of music, of instruments, tunes,
and the profit to be derived from them.] The
principal object of this chapter is a com-

CHAP. VI. mendation of sacred music, and a censure of that which is effeminate and convivial, by which he particularly means to allude to the musical performances of the minstrels. By the way, as it is under the head of music that they are first introduced by John of Salisbury, it is fair to infer from this, in corroboration of a thousand other evidences, that music and song were always the chief, though by no means the only, objects of attention to the minstrels.

The title of the seventh chapter is, *De dissimilitudine Augusti et Neronis*. [Of the opposite dispositions of Augustus and Nero.] This chapter consists of a story of Augustus being roughly reprimanded by an old soldier who found him playing upon a musical instrument; a freedom which Augustus took in good part, and in consequence of which he ceased from practising as a musician ever after. This is contrasted by the author with certain well known instances of the infatuation of Nero in this respect. The chapter concludes with a transition to the stage in these words, *Histrionibus et mimis pecunias infinitas erogare*

non gravabatur. [He (Nero) made no scruple CHAP. VI.
of bestowing immense sums of money upon
actors and stage-buffoons.]

The title of the eighth chapter is, *De bistrionibus, et mimis, et præstigiatoribus*. [Of actors, and stage-buffoons, and jugglers.] Here the author commences with a warm censure of the great men his contemporaries, who, though they would be unwilling to make common cause with Nero's infamy, were not backward to follow his example in this species of prodigal expence: and it is remarkable that he does not describe this expence as being employed in rewarding these modern *bistriones*, but *in exhibendâ malitiâ eorum* [on the exhibition of their wicked devices]. So that it would seem, here were not only plays, but plays which, in the theatrical phrase, cost considerable sums of money in the "getting up." The author then introduces a most contemptuous character of the spectacles thus exhibited. He says the players [*bistriones*] in Nero's time were comparatively respectable men, and worthy of countenance; and he mentions Plautus, Me-

CHAP. VI. nander and Terence, apparently for the purpose of casting the greater odium upon these modern *malitiæ*. He expressly denominates the objects against which he is inveighing *spectacula, et infinita tyrocinia vanitatis, quibus qui omnino otiari non possunt, perniciosius occupentur* [spectacles, and innumerable rudiments of vanity, by which persons who could not endure to be totally idle might be occupied in worse than idleness]. To these words succeeds the enumeration already given of eight or ten denominations, which the author sums up under the term of *tota JOCULATORUM scæna*, an appellation which, as has been shown, was by the Latin writers of that day particularly appropriated to the minstrels. He then adds some anecdotes of these exhibitors who were "admitted into the greatest houses," which, if genuine, and not rather founded upon misinformation, cherished as it was likely to be by the prejudices of a monk, are well entitled to surprise us. He says that "they exposed the obscene parts of the body, and practised such indecences respecting them before a public audience, as might make

a Cynic blush," and he concludes with a state-
ment, which, if less profligate, is perhaps still
more filthy, for which we refer the curious
reader to the work itself.

It seems to be evident beyond question,
from these passages of John of Salisbury,
combined with the terms *bistriones* and *mimi*,
established appellations for the minstrels
among the writers of that age, and with the
consideration of the minstrels, whose epithets
and accomplishments were so exceedingly
varied, being the only persons who then
travelled the country proffering their exhi-
bitions to any one who would pay them, that
there existed profane dramatic entertainments
early in the twelfth century in England, and
that it was by this order of men that the
characters which composed them were per-
formed.

Profane
plays in
the
twelfth
century.

It is reasonable to believe that the plays,
particularly of this early period, were, in
point of composition, to the last degree mean,
poor and inartificial. Not one of these pieces
has come down to us, though we are in pos-
session of many of the songs, and much of the

CHAP. VI. diffuser poetry of that period. This argument however is not very decisive, since we have no books the production of so early an age, except those written by the monks: the ballads of the minstrels were probably preserved by oral tradition. Chaucer and Gower are among the earliest lay authors in England whose works are of any considerable size. We may however recollect that the early dramatic pieces which are preserved in our language, though the productions of a later and more enlightened period, scarcely deserve a better character than that given above. Perhaps the stories exhibited by the minstrels were performed only in dumb show. Perhaps the outline of the scene only was premeditated, and the dialogue was supplied by the performers on the spot. Some readers will imagine that performances so rude scarcely deserved the minute investigation in which we are engaged. But it will speedily be seen that the early history of the English stage can never be completely understood without this elucidation.

Miracle-
plays.
CENT.
12 and
13.

We may divide the early performance and

personation of real or imaginary events in this CHAP. VI.
country, into two classes, the profane and the
sacred. The sacred were either Miracles, or
Mysteries: the Miracle-plays being an ex-
hibition taken from the history of some saint
who had been canonised by the church, and
the Mysteries a representation of some event
recorded in the Old or New Testament. The
earliest record we possess of a sacred play is
in Matthew Paris^a; the story being taken
from the legend of St. Catharine, and the
play acted in the abbey of Dunstable, pro-
bably about the year 1110. The author of
the piece was by name Gaufrid, a Norman
and afterward abbot of St. Albans, one of
the highest monastic dignities in England.

It is easy for any one who will attend to
the proceedings of the church in this period
of its history, to explain the policy which
led it to cultivate so assiduously the exhibition
of sacred dramas. The clergy were at this
time nearly all-powerful; and they cannot be

^a Vitæ Viginti Trium Abbatum Sancti Albani, No. 16.

CHAP. VI. accused of any heedlessness or indolence as to the embracing every means to perpetuate and enlarge their power. Considered as a body, they were no visionaries, no dealers in spiritualities and abstractions to the neglect of the practical character of the human species. They had much leisure through the means of their monastic institutions and their celibacy; and they reflected deeply, and in a spirit of cordial co-operation, upon the surest methods for swaying implicitly the minds of mankind. No expedients, of terror, of despotism, or austerity, were left untried by them. But these were not their only expedients. They could be fierce with the froward, and gentle with the submissive. They rendered themselves the confidants and the fathers of those who trusted them; and there was no fatherly office of encouragement, of soothing, of prudent counsel and seemingly disinterested sympathy, which they did not fully discharge.

But there was one principle which above all others stamped the policy of the clergy in the middle ages. They considered man as the

creature of his senses, and addressed them-
selves most elaborately to his eye and his
ear. This principle, which must always be
important to those who wish to domineer,
was especially so when mankind was so little
enlightened and intellectualised. The clergy
therefore sought, as far as they could, to en-
gross to themselves every thing which was
magnificent and awful. They went further
than this. They desired to be the sole
source of amusement to the people. To this
purpose were directed their shows, their pro-
cessions, and their festivals. Above all, they
were jealous of the minstrels; and, as ap-
pears from what has been already said, not
unreasonably so, for in this career the min-
strels were formidable rivals. It is impos-
sible to look into any of the monkish writers
about this period, without being struck with
the excessive antipathy they express to this
order of men.

This then is the true explanation of the
origin of the Miracle-plays, and the Mysteries.
The clergy were not content with abusing the
minstrels, treating them with the utmost con-

CHAP. VI. tumely, and refusing them the sacred communion and Christian burial^b; they desired, in addition to this, to rival them in their own arts. They wished to take away from the laity the very inclination to listen to them; and for this purpose they could think of no better expedient than to copy their amusements. This is probably the true reason why church-music was so assiduously cultivated in the early ages; for the clergy had the scalds and the gleemen to contend with, before the appearance of the minstrels. No sooner then had the minstrels brought forward a new species of entertainment, the dramatic, than the clergy thought it high time that they too should have their plays.

They were not deterred by the considerations which might influence the more demure and decorous churchmen of later ages. They understood the race of men they had to do with. They knew that they might exhibit Eve and the serpent, and God

^b De Nugis Curialium, Lib. I, cap. 8.

the Father, and the Holy Ghost, and Christ, CHAP. VI.
and the devil, on a public stage, without in the least degree shocking the passive audiences of these pious ages. They knew that their creed was too deeply fixed, and their spiritual pastors had too many avenues to their passions, to allow the mixture of laughter and ribaldry with all which was sacred and all which was mysterious, to be in the least degree dangerous to the stability of their faith. Sober thinking and extensive information must have taken their turn, before light laughter can produce any perceptible effect in overturning the most daring impositions.

Though we do not possess any very detailed account of the Miracle-plays of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we find them mentioned by the writers of that period in a way which proves that they were extremely common. Fitzstephen, the biographer of Thomas of Becket, in his Description of London, treating of the amusements of this metropolis, has a passage, thus translated by Strype: "London, instead of common interludes belonging to the theatre, hath plays

CHAP. VI. of a more holy subject; representations of those miracles which the holy confessors wrought, or of the sufferings, wherein the glorious constancy of martyrs did appear^c. And Matthew Paris, a historian of the thirteenth century, in his account of the play of St. Catharine at Dunstable, above mentioned, remarks that it was of that species of performance, "which we usually call Miracles^d;" a phrase strongly expressive of the frequency of such exhibitions.

Profane
plays in
the thir-
teenth
century.

The mention of profane plays and players occurs by no means less frequently in the old writers. Mr. Warton^e has brought forward a record, which he ascribes to the year 1200,

^c *Londonia pro spectaculis theatralibus, pro ludis scenicis, ludos habet sanctiores, &c.* Stephanides, apud Leland's Itinerary, Vol. VIII. Stow, Survey of London, by Strype, Appendix.

^d *Quem miracula vulgariter appellamus.*

^e History of English Poetry, Vol. I, Sect. vi. This work merits to be described as an immense treasury of materials, not always accurately collected, but always jumbled together in the most incoherent manner of which perhaps there is any example in the annals of literature.

in which the king's permission is sold to a CHAP. VI. widow, to marry her daughter to whomever she pleases, except the king's mimics (*mimici*). The fourth general council of Lateran, which sat in the year 1215, made a decree prohibiting the clergy from attending secular plays^f. In the year 1258 an injunction was given by the barons of England to the religious houses, that "secular plays (*bistri-
onum ludi*) should not be seen, or heard, or permitted to be performed before the abbot, or his monks^g." And in 1287 *ludi theatrales* are forbidden to be performed in churches and church-yards, on vigils and festivals, by the synod of Exeter^h.

Nothing can be more certain than that the plays and players here censured were of the profane class. The sacred drama was long a favourite child of holy mother church, and was cherished and countenanced in the most pointed manner by popes and cardinals, as we

^f Dupin, Hist. Eccles. apud Henry, Book III, chap. vii.

^g Annal. Burton. apud Warton, Vol. II, Sect. ix.

^h Concil. Magn. Brit. per Wilkins, ditto.

CHAP. VI.

shall have occasion repeatedly to observe in the sequel. Nor must we wonder when we find these denunciations and prohibitions of the clergy frequenting these secular plays, so often repeated. The monks in their convents, with the exception of the most zealous or the most learned, were of necessity devoured with *ennui*: and there was no amusement, however puerile, coarse or indecorous, which they thought they could enjoy undetected, to which they did not recur with avidity. A curious story in Antony Wood to this purposeⁱ, has frequently been referred to by the writers on these subjects. It belongs to the period of the first introduction of the friars into England, in the early part of the thirteenth century. "Two holy Franciscans, having lost their way, arrived in the greatest distress at a grange belonging to the Benedictines of Abingdon, about six miles from Oxford. The porter, who opened the gate, judged from their squalid appearance, their

ⁱ Historia Universitatis Oxoniensis, ad an. 1224.

tattered garments, and their foreign idiom, CHAP. VI.
 that they were farce-players or maskers (*mimos quosdam, seu personatos*), and carried the joyful tidings in all haste to his prior. The prior, with his sacristan, the cellarer and two younger monks, flew to the gate, and, urged by the hope of entertainment in the arts of gesticulation and dramatical performance (*gesticulatoriis ludicrisque artibus*), intreated them to enter. The friars with a sad countenance assured the Benedictines that they had mistaken their men; that they were no players, but servants of God, engaged to live according to the rule of the apostles. On this the monks, exasperated at the disappointment of their joyful hopes, fell upon them at once, beat and kicked them in a cruel manner, and thrust them from their doors."

Respecting the nature of the profane plays Pageants.
 exhibited at this period we can obtain very little light. The only species of secular personation we find distinctly mentioned, is that of the Pageants which were exhibited at royal marriages and on other public occasions, and these were probably conducted in dumb show.

CHAP. VI. Of these we find one on occasion of the marriage of Henry III. in 1236^k, a second at the marriage of the eldest daughter of this monarch to Alexander III. king of Scots in 1252^k, and a third in celebration of the victory of Edward I. over the Scots in 1298^l. Many more might easily be traced.

The nature of the Pageants of these times may be illustrated by an incidental passage of Matthew Paris, applicable to this point. He is relating the dream or vision of one Thurcill, a villager of Essex, whose soul is said to have been transported from his body as he lay asleep, and introduced by a saint to a view of hell and heaven. In hell he sees, among the tormented, a knight who had passed his life in shedding innocent blood, in tournaments and robbery. He is completely armed and on horseback, and couches his lance at the demons who are commissioned to drag him to his destined torments. There

^k Matthæi Paris Historia Major, ad annos. Stow, Survey of London : sports and pastimes.

^l Stow, ditto.

are likewise a priest who never said mass, and CHAP. VI.
 a baron of the exchequer who took bribes.
 From hell Thurcill is conveyed to heaven. He
 is ushered into a garden, adorned with an
 immense variety of plants and flowers, and
 embalmed with the fragrance of odoriferous
 trees and fruits. In the midst of this garden
 Adam, a personage of gigantic proportion and
 beautiful symmetry, is seen reclined on the
 side of a fountain which sends forth four
 streams of different water and colour, and
 under the shade of a tree of uncommon size
 and height, laden with fruits of every kind
 and emitting the most delicious odours. The
 scenes of this vision Matthew Paris names
 the infernal pageants^m.

The Miracle-plays, as we have seen, were
 extremely common during the twelfth and
 thirteenth centuries. They are defined by
 Fitzstephen, as representing “either the mi-
 racles which the holy confessors wrought, or
 the sufferings in which the glorious constancy

Mysteries.
 CENT. 14.

^m *Ludi demonum—spectacula.* Matt. Paris, ad ann. 1206.

CHAP. VI. of martyrs did appear." No other species of sacred play is mentioned either by Fitzstephen, Matthew Paris or Chaucer. Of the Mystery no trace seems to be discoverable further back than about the close of the thirteenth century. It was a drama representing the events of the Old and New Testaments. It passed from the legend to the fundamental record of our religion, from the ornaments to the stamina of the faith, and in this respect appears to have been considered as a great improvement upon the sacred plays which had preceded it.

The earliest mention which seems to occur of a play founded on the incidents of sacred writ, is in the year 1298. On the festival of Pentecost in that year the Play of Christ, representing his passion, resurrection, ascension, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, was performed by the clergy of Civita Vecchia in Italy, in the hall of the patriarch of the Austrian dominions ; and again in 1304 the chapter of Civita Vecchia represented a play of the creation of man, the annunciation of the virgin, the birth of Christ and other

passages of holy scriptureⁿ. A collection CHAP. VI. of Mysteries said to have been performed at Chester, at the expence of the different trading companies of that city, in the year 1327, but which the biographer of Lorenzo de Medicis peremptorily decides to be antedated nearly two centuries^o, is still in existence^p. The subjects of these Mysteries are the Fall of Lucifer; the Creation; the Deluge; Abraham, Melchisedec and Lot; Moses, Balaam and Balak; the Salutation and Nativity; the Three Kings; the Massacre of the Innocents; &c, &c. There is also a collection of Mysteries performed at Coventry, which pretends to nearly equal antiquity^q. A play of the Children of Israel (*ludus filiorum Israelis*), probably the Exodus or departure out of Egypt, with the épisode of the Red Sea, was performed by the guild of Corpus Christi

ⁿ Chron. Forojul. apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

^o Life of Lorenzo, Chap. v.

^p Among the Harleian manuscripts in the British Museum.

^q Among the Cottonian manuscripts in the British Museum.

CHAP. VI. at Cambridge in the year 1355^r. The Coventry Mysteries are said to have been performed by the mendicants of the house of the Gray-Friars in that city^s. In France we have an account of ten pounds being paid toward the charges of acting the Passion of Christ, which was represented by masks at Anjou in the year 1386^t: and in 1398 certain citizens of Paris met at St. Maur to represent a piece on the same subject, but were prohibited by the magistrates of that city. Shortly after however they obtained a licence and patent of incorporation from the king^u.

These exhibitions were conceived at this period to contribute so much to the civilising the minds of the common people, who were thus called off from sports in which mere

^r Masters, apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

^s Stevens, Monasticon, apud Malone, Historical Account of the English Stage, prefixed to his edition of Shakespear.

^t Suppl. ad Du Cange, apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

^u Beauchamps, Recherches sur les Theatres de France, ditto,

brutal strength and corporeal dexterity were CHAP. VI.
exerted, to amusements of a more intellectual
class; and to conduce so essentially to the
instructing persons who were unable to read,
in the great facts and outline of their re-
ligion, that, as we are informed by a docu-
ment annexed to the Chester Mysteries, the
pope proclaimed a pardon of one thousand
days to every one who resorted peaceably to
these exhibitions during the festival of Whit-
suntide, to which the bishop of the diocese,
of his own munificence, added an indulgence
of forty days more; the pope at the same
time denouncing eternal damnation against
those reprobate persons who should presume
to disturb or interrupt these sacred sports.

A memorable exhibition of a Mystery, en-
titled the Massacre of the Innocents, took
place at Constance in the year 1417; being
given by the English fathers, and performed
before the members of the celebrated council
then held at that place^v. The account of

^v L'Enfant, Hist. Conc. Constan. ditto.

CHAP. VI. this piece coincides in so many points with a drama on the same subject, written by John Parfre in 1512, and printed in Hawkins's collection entitled the Origin of the English Drama, as to make it probable that Parfre's piece is a liberal translation, or an abbreviation, of the play at Constance, which must be supposed to have been written in Latin. As the historian appears to recite certain expressions from the drama of 1417, we may conclude that it was not a mere exhibition in dumb show.

About the close of the fourteenth century the practice of acting sacred plays seems to have assumed a more systematical form, and to have approached more nearly to the modern prevailing ideas of a regular theatre. In Shakespear we meet with several allusions to the custom, sufficiently frequent in his time, of having the characters in plays wholly represented by boys: particularly there is a passage in his tragedy of Hamlet which has often been quoted in this relation^w. This

^w Act II, Scene ii.

custom was of long standing, and appears to CHAP. VI. have been as old as the time of Chaucer. In 1378, in the beginning of the reign of Richard II, a petition was presented by the scholars of St. Paul's School, praying the king "to prohibit some unexpert people from presenting the History of the Old Testament, to the great prejudice of the said clergy, who have been at great expence in order to represent it publicly at Christmas ^x."

In the same reign we meet with the representation of dramas of a similar description by the society of the parish-clerks ^y. The idea of such a representation carries something ludicrous to our minds. But it certainly was not so understood at that time. It has justly been observed ^z that the parish-clerks might be considered in some sense as a learned society at a time when the art of reading was comparatively a rare accomplishment; and no one in the slightest degree accustomed to

^x Dodsley, Collection of Old Plays, Preface.

^y Stow, Survey of London: sports and pastimes.

^z Warton, Vol. II, Sect. xvi.

CHAP. VI. speculate upon the operations of the human mind, can fail to acknowledge that the self-estimation and honest thirst after excellence of any order of men, eminently depend upon the estimation in which they are held by their neighbours. The parish-clerks were incorporated into a guild by Henry III. about the year 1240, under the patronage of St. Nicholas^a. It was anciently customary for men and women of the first quality, ecclesiastics and others, who were lovers of church-music, to be admitted into this corporation; and they gave large gratuities for the support and education of persons practised in this art^a. This society was usually hired as a band of vocal performers, to assist at the funerals of the nobility and other distinguished persons, which were celebrated in London or its neighbourhood^a. They clearly therefore held a very different place in the community from that which they occupy at this time.

Yet the circumstance of the Mysteries being

^a Stow, Survey of London, by Strype, Book V, Chap. xiv.

now presented by the parish-clerks may perhaps be construed as an indication of growing refinement in European society. In the darker ages the high-spirited monk in his cloister, and the mortified and holy friar, did not scruple to take a part in these godly exhibitions. But now a suspicion seems to have darted into their minds, that the being thus accoutered in mummary, and personating fictitious rage and well-dissembled grief, was not altogether consistent with the loftiness or purity of their professions. They resigned this office therefore to a more modest, and not less pliable order of men.

In the year 1391 the parish-clerks played certain interludes at Skinners Well near London for three days successively, the king, queen, and many of the nobility being present at the performance^b. And in the year 1409 they represented at the same place “a great play, which lasted eight dayes, and was of matter from the creation of the

^b Stow, Survey of London : sports and pastimes.

CHAP. VI. world [that is, a sort of compendium of universal history]: there were to see the same, the most parte of the nobles and gentles in England: and forthwith after began a royall justing in Smithfelde, between the earle of Somerset, the seneshall of Henault^c,” and other distinguished personages.

Chaucer, as has already been observed, mentions the Miracles in his Canterbury Tales^d, but not the Mysteries: yet his Canterbury Tales were the last of his works, and it is therefore certain that the representations of Mysteries were by no means uncommon at the time of his writing this work. The mention of the Miracle-plays however is put into the mouth of a city-dame; and the intention of the author may have been to indicate that these, as being of more ancient institution, were ordinary exhibitions; but that the Mysteries were of a select character, and had not yet descended to the vulgar.

Profane plays, masquings and pageants, no

Profane
plays in
the four-
teenth
century.

^c Stow, Annals, A. D. 1409. ^d vers. 6140.

less than the sacred drama, seem to have CHAP. VI made considerable advances in the fourteenth century. Before the year 1300 the ceremony of a king of France dining in public is thus described^c. During the entertainment the company were regaled with music by the minstrels, who played upon the kettle-drum, cornet, flute, trumpet, violin, and various other instruments. Beside these, certain *farceurs, jongleurs et plaisantins* diverted the company with their drolleries and comedies. The historian adds, that many noblemen of France were entirely ruined by the expences they lavished upon this species of performers.

About the year 1331 a law was made by the English parliament, ordaining that a company of men styled vagrants, who had made masquerades through the whole city, should be whipped out of London, because they represented scandalous things in the petty

^c Du Cange, Dissertat. sur Joinv. apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

CHAP. VI. alehouses, and other places where the populace assembled ^f. These were probably some of the lower retainers of the order of minstrels.

In the year 1348 an item of expenditure is entered in the public accounts, for furnishing the plays or sports of the king (*ludos*), held in the castle of Guildford at the festival of Christmas ^g. Among various dresses provided for this purpose, are fourteen visors representing the faces of women, fourteen of men with beards, and fourteen of angels, together with fourteen mantles embroidered with the eyes of peacocks, fourteen with the heads of dragons, fourteen with stars of gold and silver, and various other devices. An entertainment somewhat similar is described in 1377, the last year of Edward III, which was made by the citizens of London for the entertainment of Richard prince of Wales. One hundred and thirty citizens

^f Dodsley, Collection of Old Plays, Preface.

^g Wardrobe-roll of Edward III, apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

“in a mummerie” rode from Newgate to CHAP. VI.
 Kennington, where the prince resided, variously disguised; “one richly arrayed like an emperour, and one stately tyred like a pope, whom followed twenty-four cardinals.” This was a dumb show; for the historian adds, when they had entered the hall of the palace, they were met by the prince, his mother and the lords, “whom the saide mummers did salute, shewing by a paire of dice upon the table their desire to play with the prince, which they so handled,” that the prince won of them a bowl, a cup and a ring of gold^h. Another entertainment, of a like kind to that of Edward III. in 1348, is recorded to have taken place before Richard II. in 1391ⁱ.

Two masquerades in France and England, a little subsequent to this period, have become objects of general history by the political events with which they are connected.

Masque-
rades.

^h Stow, Survey of London: sports and pastimes.

ⁱ Wardrobe-roll, apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

CHAP. VI. Charles VI. of France, the rival monarch of our Henry V, was subject to occasional fits of melancholy or frantic alienation of mind. This disease became more obstinate and confirmed by an accident which befel him in the year 1393. A masquerade was held at court, in which the king, attired as a satyr, led in a chain four young noblemen in similar dresses. The garments they wore were daubed with resin, and surmounted with tufts and baldrics of tow. The duke of Orleans, the king's brother, accidentally approached with a flambeau too near to one of these dresses, which caught fire in a moment, and, communicating to the rest, the four lords were burned to death, and the life of the king was with the greatest difficulty saved^k. The English masquerade recorded by our general historians occurred in 1400. The dukes of Surry, Exeter and Albemarle formed a project for the assassination of king Henry IV. For this purpose they seized the occasion of the

^k Voltaire, Histoire Générale, chap. lxxvii.

festival of Christmas, which Henry proposed CHAP. VI. to celebrate at Windsor with justings and other entertainments. Under colour of a mask or mummary they purposed to enter the castle and assault the king; but he, having received timely notice of their conspiracy, privately withdrew, and the plot of the malcontents, thus defeated, terminated only in the ruin of its contrivers¹.

Toward the close of the fourteenth century we meet with more definite and unquestionable records of the exhibition of profane plays, than in the periods preceding. In 1378 a royal carousal was given by Charles V. of France to his guest the emperor Charles IV, which was closed with a theatrical representation of the Conquest of Jerusalem by Godfrey of Bouillon^m. In 1392 the school-boys of Angiers are said to have represented the play of Robin and Marian, according to their annual customⁿ: and in 1395 a play was

¹ Hollinshed, apud Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

^m Felibien, ditto.

ⁿ Suppl. ad Du Cange, ditto. We shall find hereafter

CHAP. VI. acted at Paris on the interesting story of Patient Grisilde, which has been printed several times, and, in the fashionable language of that age, is entitled *Le Mystère de Grisildis marquise de Saluce*°, though it could scarcely be mistaken by any of the parties concerned for a story extracted from sacred writ.

An author whose work has been extensively read, says, speaking of the Miracle-play of St. Catharine acted in 1110, "Hence we might be led to conclude that this miracle-play was composed in dialogue, but there is reason to conjecture that the whole consisted in dumb shew, and that the author's only merit lay in the arrangement of the incidents and machinery.—Nor do I conceive it possible to adduce a dramatic composition in the English language, that can indisputably be placed before the year 1500; previous to which time they were common in Italy^p."

that Maid Marian was the favourite mistress of the celebrated Robin Hood.

• Beauchamps, ditto. Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi.

* Roscoe, Life of Lorenzo, chap. v.

The phrases, "there is reason to con-CHAP. VI.
jecture," and "there is every reason to
believe," certainly have a very imposing
effect, when they proceed from the pen of a
writer of credit. But, whatever weight they
might have with us in a cursory reading, they
must necessarily pass, in the discussion in
which we are here engaged, for little or
nothing. As the author has refrained from
assigning his reasons, it is incumbent upon
us to enquire for ourselves, what it is that
there is most "reason to conjecture." Now,
if we derive our arguments from the nature
of the thing, it does not seem in any degree
more obvious and easy to invent a silent,
than a speaking, drama. A drama must
necessarily be more or less an imitation of
life, and in real life men do not discharge their
most important concerns in silence, but with
the intervention of words. To judge ab-
stractedly, pantomime would strike us as the
offspring of refinement, not as the first and
most easy species of drama. The Greek
theatre did not begin in pantomime. Specu-
lative men are much too apt to invent great

CHAP. VI. and striking epochs in the progress of society.

— In fact however it is difficult to assign the period when any memorable practice or institution begins. It ordinarily begins unremarked, and continues for some time before it acquires a name. There is scarcely a nation in the world, except the most barbarous, which does not possess some rude outline of a drama. No sooner is the mode introduced for one individual to speak or sing for the entertainment of an assembly, than the idea of two persons speaking or singing alternately or in dialogue is close at hand. We have then immediately a species of comedy or opera. Examples of this under the head of singing might easily be adduced from the songs of the minstrels. Thus, we know that our ancestors at a very remote period had public entertainments in dialogue; we know that they had plots of incident performed in representation and action; and the question which remains is, whether the indirect hints of John of Salisbury and others, together with the strong inferences of general reasoning, shall have sufficient weight to persuade

us, that, from the earliest periods subsequent CHAP. VI.
to the Norman conquest, the idea occurred
to them of joining plot and dialogue to-
gether.

DIVERSIONS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY CON-
TAINED.—HUNTER-GAMES—SUMPTUOUS
ENTERTAINMENTS—SHOWS—HUNTING AND
HAWKING—JACQUET—ATHLETIC EXERCISES—
ROBBERY—TOURNAMENTS.

CHAP. VII. THE TONE OF MANNERS AND OF THE POPULAR
MIND IN THOSE EARLY AGES CANNOT BE FULLY
UNDERSTOOD, WITHOUT REFERRING TO THE FEAST
OF FOOLS, OF THE ASS, AND OF INNOCENTS, WHICH
WERE DULY CELEBRATED AT THE RETURN OF CERTAIN
PERIODS, AND WERE LONG CHAINED WITH PO-
CULAR AFFECTION BY THE POPULACE OF THIS, AND
THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES. THE INDECORUM
PRACTISED ON THESE OCCASIONS CANNOT FAIL TO BE
EXTREMELY ASTONISHING TO READERS OF THE PRESENT
DAY, AND COME GREATLY HEIGHTENED TO OUR IM-
AGINATION BY THE UNCOUNTED AND EXTRAVAGANT
ALLIANCE WHICH SUBSISTED BETWEEN THEM AND
THE MOST SOLEMN ORDINANCES OF THE ESTABLISHED

CHAP. VII.

DIVERSIONS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY CONTINUED.—BURLESQUE FESTIVALS.—SUMPTUOUS ENTERTAINMENTS.—SHOWS.—HUNTING AND HAWKING.—ARCHERY.—ATHLETIC EXERCISES.—ROBBERY.—TOURNAMENTS.

CHAP. VII.

THE tone of manners and of the popular mind in these early ages cannot be fully understood, without adverting to the Feast of Fools, of the Ass, and of Innocents, which were duly celebrated at the return of certain periods, and were long cherished with peculiar affection by the populace of this, and the neighbouring countries. The indecorums practised on these occasions cannot fail to be extremely astonishing to readers of the present day, and come greatly heightened to our imagination by the uncouth and extravagant alliance which subsisted between them and the most solemn ordinances of the established

religion. These festivities had in them some-
thing of the form of a dramatical exhibition,
and therefore naturally offer themselves to
our consideration in this place. They have
been conjectured by eminent antiquaries to
be a remnant of the old Roman *Saturnalia*^a;
and those who are aware of the multitude of
practices prevailing in Christian Rome, which
were borrowed from the religious customs and
institutions of pagan Rome before the com-
mencement of our vulgar era^b, will not regard
this as a forced or improbable conjecture.

On the annual return of the Feast of Fools,
the ceremony was commenced by the election
of a pontiff or prelate of fools. This dig-
nitary was suitably attended by a conclave or
chapter of his own order. Ecclesiastics and
laymen, rich and poor, joined promiscuously
in the burlesque and tumultuous procession.
Those who formed it were attired in the most
ridiculous manner; some masked, some with

Feast of
Fools.

^a Selden, Table-Talk: art. Christmas.

^b Middleton, Letter from Rome.

CHAP. VII. their faces painted so as to produce a hideous effect, and others accoutered like women, and indulging themselves in a variety of wanton and indecent gestures. Thus prepared, they proceeded to the cathedral, or principal church, of which they took possession; while the bishop of fools, habited in the ecclesiastical garments, pronounced mass, and gave his benediction to the audience. The service was interrupted from time to time by the singing of lascivious songs; and some of the assistants played at dice on the altar, while others celebrated the holy communion. Another part of the ceremony was the shaving, probably with the monastic tonsure, on a stage erected for that purpose, the precentor of fools, who during the operation amused the spectators with absurd gestures and contortions, and ribald jests. Filth and the bodies of dead animals were then thrown from hand to hand, and in the faces of the performers and audience. The bishop, having quitted the church, was drawn in an open carriage through the different streets of the town, and

the cavalcade was every where welcomed CHAP.VII.
with riotous mockery, festivity and joy^c.

The Feast of the Ass differed in some particulars from the Feast of Fools. A wooden ass, inclosing a speaker, was the central figure of the procession. Balaam was mounted on this ass, with an immense pair of spurs, and otherwise equiped in the most farcical manner. The angel was to appear, the ass to be unmercifully beaten, and at last to save himself from further chastisement by the dignity and good sense of his remonstrances. The miraculous brute was then to be led in triumph, in commemoration of the signal victory he had obtained over the unholy prophet. On this occasion the whole band of the ancient patriarchs attended, to do honour to this new medium of inspiration. Six Jews, and six Gentiles, among the latter of whom was the poet Virgil, made a part of his train. As the procession moved on, these personages chanted certain prayers, and conversed in character

Feast of the
Ass.

^c Tilliot, Mem. de la Fête des Foux, apud Warton, Vol. II, Sect. xvi. Strutt, Book IV, chap. iii.

CHAP. VII. on the birth and kingdom of Christ. At length they arrived at the church, where mass was said as in the Feast of Fools, and at the end of each paragraph or stanza, by way of a burthen, the audience sung out a melodious braying, in imitation of the voice of the animal whose achievement they celebrated^d.

Feast of
Innocents.

These festivals, as will easily be imagined, were most cherished and cultivated in the darkest ages. The Feast of Innocents was continued to a considerably later period. This seems to have been observed in all collegiate churches through England and France. On the anniversary of St. Nicholas^e, the patron of scholars, and on that of the Holy Innocents^f, one of the children of the choir, habited in episcopal robes, with the mitre and crosier, assumed the title and state of a bishop, and exacted ecclesiastical obedience from his fellows who were attired like priests. They took possession of the church, and performed all the offices and ceremonies usually cele-

^d Warton, Vol. I, Sect. vi. Strutt, ubi supra.

^e December 6.

^f December 28.

brated by the bishop and his prebendaries. CHAP.VII.
 They also presented Moralities and shows of
 Miracles, with farces and other sports, but
 such only as were supposed compatible with
 decorum^g. Some of their proceedings are
 thus described in an order of council made
 for their suppression, in the latter part of
 the reign of Henry VIII. “Whereas here-
 tofore dyvers and many superstitious and
 chydysch observances have been used, and yet
 to this day are observed and kept in many
 and sundry places of this realm —; child-
 ren be strangelic decked and apparayled to
 counterfeit priests, bishops and women, and
 so ledde with songs and dances from house to
 house, blessing the people, and gathering of
 money; and boyes do singe masse, and preache
 in the pulpits, with such other unfitinge and
 inconvenient usages, which tend rather to
 derysyon than enie true glorie to God, or
 honor of his sayntes —^h.” Dr. Colet how-

^g Warton, ubi supra.

^h Cottonian MSS. apud Strutt, ubi supra.

CHAP. VII. ever, dean of St. Paul's, and founder of St. Paul's school, one of the most respectable clergymen of the age in which he lived, saw this subject in a different light. He has expressly directed in the statutes of that school, drawn up in the year 1512, that his scholars "shall every Childermas (Innocents') day come to Paule's church, and hear the childe byshop's sermon; and after be at hygh masse: and each of them offer a penny to the childe byshop, and with them the maisters and surveyors of the scoleⁱ." It has been conjectured that the biennial ceremony at Eton College of the procession *ad montem*, originated in this ancient and popular practice^k.

Lord of
Misrule.

The three festivals of Easter, Whitsuntide and Christmas were anciently commemorated, by the kings and great nobility of England, with the utmost expence and magnificence. Our elder annalists apparently consider it as one indispensable part of their office, to re-

ⁱ Knight, Life of Colet, apud Strutt, ubi supra.

^k Warton, Vol. II, Sect. xvi.

cord where and how the sovereigns of this CHAP.VII. realm celebrated these periodical seasons of conviviality. One portion of the gaiety and amusement on these occasions consisted in the exhibition of plays, mummeries and disguisings. The Chester Mysteries, already mentioned, are accordingly denominated, from the season for which they were written, Whitsun plays. That the convivialities of these important periods might be conducted in a suitable manner, and proceed in uninterrupted succession, it was a frequent practice to appoint a temporary officer to preside over them, who was variously styled the Lord, and the Abbot, of Misrule. This mock-officer, as might be expected, was looked to rather to increase the sport, than to watch over the decorum, of the festival. Accordingly, in a journal, preserved in the Collectanea of Leland, the writer says, "This Cristmass [an. 5 Hen. VII, A.D. 1489], I saw no disgysyngs [at court], and but right few pleys; but ther was an abbot of misrule, that made mucche sport, and did right well

CHAP. VII. his office¹." As lately as the reign of Edward VI, in the year 1551, this magistracy was in so high repute, that George Ferrers, one of the most considerable writers in that celebrated repository of English poetry, the Mirror of Magistrates, was appointed by the privy council to exercise it during the twelve days of Christmas. "Who," says the old chronicler, "being of better credit and estimation than commonlie his predecessors had beene before, received all his commissions and warrants by the name of the maister of the king's pastimes. Which gentleman so well supplied his office, both in shew of sundrie sights and devises of rare inventions, and in act of divers interludes, and matters of pastime plaied by persons, as not onelie satisfied the common sort, but also were verie well liked and allowed by the councell, and other of skill in the like pastimes: but best of all by the yoong king himselfe, as appeered by his

Leland, Collectanea, Vol. IV, p. 255.

princelie liberalitie in rewarding that ser-vice^m.” CHAP.VII.

A whimsical account has been preserved of the election and mode of proceeding of an officer bearing the same title, not resident at court, or attending upon the houses of the opulent, but chosen by persons of inferior rank dwelling in their several parishes. This deserves to be cited, as particularly illustrative of the tastes and manners of our ancestors. “First of all,” says the author, “the wilde heades of the parish, flocking together, chuse them a graund captaine of mischiefe, whom they innoble with the title of Lord of Misrule; and him they crowne with great solemnity, and adopt for their king. This king annoynted chooseth forth twentie, forty, threescore, or an hundred, like to himself, to waite upon his lordly majesty, and to garde his noble person. Then every one of these men he investeth with his liveries of greene, yellow, or some other light wanton colour,

^m Hollinshed, ad ann.

CHAP.VII. and, as though they were not gawdy ynough, they bedecke themselves with scarffes, ribbons and laces, hanged all over with gold ringes, pretious stones and other jewels. This done, they tie aboute either legge twentie or fourtie belles, with riche handkerchiefes in their handes, and sometimes laide acrossse over their shoulders and neckes. Thus all thinges set in order, then have they their hobby horses, their dragons, and other antickes, together with their baudie pipers, and thundring drummers, to strike the devil's daunce with all. Then march this heathen company towards the church, their pypers pyping, their drummers thundring, their belles jynghing, their handkerchiefes fluttering aboute their heades like madde men, their hobbie horses and other monsters skirmishing amongst the throng: and in this sorte they go to the church, though the minister be at prayer or preaching, dauncing and singing with such a confused noise that no man can heare his own voyce: and thus these terrestrial furies spend the sabbath day. Then they have certaine papers wherein is painted some babe-

lerie or other of imagerie worke, and these CHAP.VII.
they call my Lord of Misrule's badges or cognizances. These they give to every one that will give them money to maintain them in this their heathenish devilrie; and who will not show himself buxome to them and give them money, they shall be mocked and flouted shamefully; yea, and many times carried upon a cowlstaffe, and dived over heade and eares in water, or otherwise most horribly abusedⁿ."

The coarseness of manner, the broad humour, and the ribaldry, displayed on these occasions, are essential features of the character of our ancestors in these early ages. Historians, who from a misjudged delicacy of sentiment suppress them, by no means discharge the office which they have rashly and unadvisedly undertaken, and are in danger of painting all scenes with insipidity, and all ages alike. Critics, who do not bear these

ⁿ Stubs, Anatomie of Abuses, 1595, apud Strutt, ubi supra.

CHAP. VII. features in their memory, are by no means qualified to do justice to our ancient poets; and will often impute their flat or indecorous passages for a fault, where, if they saw the subject in its full extent, they would be impressed with admiration and awe of the men who, in the midst of so much rudeness and ill taste, preserved in so high a degree the purity of their thoughts. Chaucer, however superior he may be considered to the age in which he lived, had yet the frailties of a man, spent his days more or less in such scenes as have been described, and was acted upon, like other men, by what he heard and saw, by what inspired his contemporaries with approbation or with rapture.

Sumptuous
entertain-
ments.

Nothing is more characteristic of these early times than the splendid style in which persons of royal and noble rank then lived, particularly on great and solemn festivals. This was a circumstance intimately connected with the nature of the feudal establishment. As, under this scheme of policy, all landed property was construed as vesting in the lord, so all the tenants of the soil were taught to

regard it as their highest privilege, to be CHAP.VII. deemed his domestic servants. Though the feudal system is now to be considered as extinct, yet, as has already been remarked, a thousand vestiges of its operation are found in our present institutions. It is from this source that we derive our lord chamberlain and lord steward, our grooms of the bed-chamber whose privilege it is to help the king to his clothes, our masters of the horse and of the hounds, and a long catalogue of offices, which relatively to our present manners are sordid, but which are always bestowed upon persons of birth and rank. In the same manner the different electors of Germany are variously styled the arch-marshal, or farrier, the arch-sewer, or butler, and the arch-cup-bearer, of the Holy Roman Empire.

This system of manners unavoidably led to a profuse and magnificent style of living. Some idea may be formed of this from that memorable vestige of ancient hospitality Westminster Hall, which, we are told °, was

° Stow, Annals, A. D. 1099.

CHAP.VII. built by William Rufus for his dining-room.

Hugh Le Despenser the elder, in the reign of Edward II, in a petition presented by him to the parliament, enumerates among the contents of his larder six hundred bacon-hogs, eighty carcasses of beef, and six hundred of sheep, of which he complains that he had been despoiled by the depredations of his enemies^p. There is an account extant of the expenditure of Thomas earl of Lancaster grandson to Henry III, for one year (the year 1313^q), from which it appears that he paid in that period, on the score of his household-establishment alone, a sum equal to £.109,635 of our present money. Among the items of this account are upward of one hundred and eighty-four tuns, or three hundred and sixty-eight pipes, of wine, which cost him however something less than five shillings and eight pence, or £.4 : 5 : 0. of our present money, *per* pipe. During the reign of Richard II,

^p Hume, Chap. xiv.

^q Stow, Survey of London: of orders and customs. Anderson on Commerce, sub ann.

ten thousand persons sat down to table every CHAP. VII.
day in the royal houshold^r. And of Richard
earl of Warwick, the king-maker, it is related
that, when he came to London, his retinue
was so considerable that six oxen were often
eaten by them for a breakfast^s.

The English nation appears at this early Shows.
period to have displayed a most vehement
attachment to shows and spectacles, exhi-
bited in the open air, and in places of nu-
merous and promiscuous concourse. There
is in spectacles of this nature an entirely
different character from that of shows con-
trived by professional artists for their private
emolument, and brought out in places where,
a certain sum having been demanded for ad-
mission, the spectators are afterward seated at
their ease, quiet and undisturbed. In the old
English spectacles here alluded to, the passers
by or attendants made an essential part of
the show; every thing was free and uncon-
strained; and every man was called upon for

^r Stow, Annals, A.D. 1399. ^s Ditto, A.D. 1468.

CHAP. VII. a certain exertion to make good his post, and obtain his share of the amusement. There was a degree therefore of life, animation, gaiety, and perhaps humour, required or called out on such occasions, very unlike the torpid and lethargic state, in so far at least as regards muscular exertion and active power, of a spectator at a theatre.

These spectacles, public in the full extent of the word, may perhaps all be classed under the general denomination of pageants; and the most remarkable of them were those exhibited at the inauguration of the chief magistrates of London and other corporate towns, the ceremonial of May-day, of setting the Midsummer-watch, and the shows exhibited at the coronation, or some other remarkable incident in the family, of the sovereign. At the lord-mayor's show, it was customary for the fronts of the houses before which the procession passed, to be covered with tapestry, arras and cloth of gold; and at proper distances certain temporary buildings were erected representing castles, palaces, gardens, rocks and forests. These scenes were peopled

Lord-may-
or's show.

with giants, dragons, saints and buffoons; the CHAP.VII.
 Nine Worthies^r were favourite characters on
 such occasions, who usually addressed the
 personages in honour of whom the exhibition
 was made, in respective monologues^u; and
 there were also, as it appears,

———— Hercules of monsters conqueryng,
 Huge great giants in a forest fighting
 With lyons, beares, wolves, apes, foxes and
 grayes,
 Baiards, brockes^v.

The ceremonial of May-day is thus de-
 scribed by the old historian. “In the moneth May-day.
 of May the citizens of London of all estates,

^r These appear to have been arbitrarily varied at different times; in one instance we find their names to have been Joshua, Hector of Troy, king David, Alexander the Great, Judas Macchabeus, Julius Cæsar, king Arthur, Charlemagne, and Guy of Warwick. Harleian MS, apud Strutt, Introd.

^u A number of similar monologues, addressed to Henry VII. at York in one of his progresses, may be found among Hearne's additions to Leland's Collectanea, Vol. IV, p. 188, et sequent.

^v Promos and Cassandra, Part II, apud Six old Plays, published by Nichols, Vol. I.

CHAP.VII. lightly in every parish, or sometimes two or three parishes joyning together, had their severall mayings, and did fetch in maypoles with diverse warlike shewes; with good archers, morice dauncers, and other devices for pastime all the day long; and towards the evening they had stage playes and bonefiers in the streetes. These great mayings and maygames were made by the governors and maisters of the citie, with the triumphant setting up of the great shaft, or principall maypole in Cornhill before the parish-church of St. Andrew, therefore called St. Andrew Undershaft^w." Among the pageants exhibited at this festival was one from the ancient story of Robin Hood. He presided as Lord of the May, and a woman, or probably a man equipped as a woman, represented Maid Marian, his faithful mistress, and was styled Lady of the May. Robin Hood was regularly followed by the most noted characters among his attendants, appropriately habited, together

^w Stow, Survey of London: sports and pastimes.

with a large band of outlaws, in coats of green^x. The first reformers were most zealous adversaries of these pageants, which they regarded as shreds and relics of popery; and bishop Latimer relates the following incident respecting them, in one of his sermons preached before Edward VI. “Coming to a certain town on a holiday to preach, I found the church door fast locked. I taryed there halfe an houre and more, and at last the key was found, and one of the parish comes to me and sayes, Syr, this is a busy day with us, we cannot hear you; it is Robin Hoode’s day; the parish are gone abroad to gather for Robin Hood; I pray you let them not.—I thought my rochet would have been regarded; but it would not serve; it was faine to give place to Robin Hood and his men^y.”

The setting the Midsummer-watch was another festival very solemnly observed, and is copiously described by the same historian. “In the moneths of June and July, on the

Setting the
Midsum-
mer-
watch.

^x Strutt, Book IV, chap. iii.

^y Latimer’s Sermons: Sermon vi.

CHAP.VII. vigiles of festivall dayes, and on the same festivall dayes in the evenings after the sunne setting, there were usually made bonefiers in the streetes, every man bestowing wood or labour towards them: the wealthier sort also before their doores neare to the said bonefiers, would set out tables on the vigiles, furnished with sweete breade and good drinke, and on the festivall dayes with meates and drinks plentifully, whereunto they would invite their neighbours and passengers also to sit and bee merrie with them in great familiaritie, praying God for his benefites bestowed on them. These were called bonefiers, as well of good amitie amongst neighbours that being before at controversie, were there by the labour of others reconciled, and made of bitter enemies, loving friendes, as also for the vertue that a great fire hath to purge the infection of the ayre.—Then had ye besides the standing watches, all in bright harnes in every ward and streete of this citie and suburbs, a marching watch, that passed through the principal streets thereof.” To furnish this watch with lights, there were appointed nine hundred

and forty men bearing cressets, each with an attendant: so that the number of cresset-men amounted to about two thousand, and the marching watch consisted of about two thousand more. The constables were equiped "in bright harnesse, some overgilte, and every one a jorret of scarlet thereupon, and a chaine of golde. The mayor himselfe came after them, well mounted on horseback, with his sword-bearer before him in fayre armour well mounted also, his footmen and torch-bearers about him, henchmen twaine upon great stirring horses following him. The sheriffes watches came one after the other in like order, but not so large in number; for where the mayor had besides his giant three pageants, each of the sheriffs had besides their giants but two pageants, ech their morrice-dance²." One of these pageants, which is expressly said to be "according to ancient custome," is described in an ordinance, dated 1564, as consisting of "four giants, one

² Stow, Survey of London: of watches.

CHAP. VII. unicorn, one dromedary, one luce, one camel, one ass, one dragon, six hobby-horses, and sixteen naked boys ^a."

Royal Pageants.

The following is the description of a pageant exhibited on occasion of the marriage of Philip and Mary. "Now as the king came to London bridge, and as he entered at the draw-bridge, was a great spectacle set up, two images representing two giants, one named Corineus, and the other Gogmagog, holding betweene them certeine Latine verses, which for the vaine ostentation of flatterie, I overpasse. From London bridge they passed to the conduit in Gracious Street, which was finelie painted,—and among other things the Nine Worthies, whereof king Henrie the Eight was one. He was painted in harnesse, having in one hand a sword, and in the other hand a booke, whereupon was written *Verbum Dei*, delivering the same booke (as it were) to his sonne king Edward, who was painted in a corner by him ^b." This last

^a Harleian MSS, apud Strutt, Introduction.

^b Hollinshed, A. D. 1554.

particular, it seems, gave great offence to the CHAP.VII
queen, as savouring of Protestantism, and was
ordered to be expunged. Queen Elizabeth,
the next in succession of the English mo-
narchs, had a strong propensity in behalf of
ostentation and show. The particulars of the
mummeries and devices with which she was
received at Kenelworth Castle, the seat of her
favourite earl of Leicester, are too well known
to need to be recited here^c. The pageant ex-
hibited as she passed through London, from
the Tower to Westminster, to her coronation,
appears to have been singularly elaborate, and
occupies no less than eight folio pages in the
description of the chronicler Hollinshed. In
closing his account of it, Hollinshed remarks,
“ two principall signes especially noted that
the queene in all hir dooings dooth shew hir
selfe most mindfull of God’s goodnesse and
mercie shewed unto hir.” The first was the
prayer which she uttered on leaving the

^c Vide Laneham, apud Nichols, Progresses of Queen Elizabeth.

CHAP.VII. Tower. “The second was the receiving of the bible at the little conduit in Cheape.” It was delivered to her by a child, gorgeously attired, who received it from a personage in a pageant, “finelie and well apparralled, all clad in white silke, and directlie over hir head was set hir name and title in Latine and English, *Temporis Filia*, The Daughter of Time, and on hir brest was written hir proper name, which was *Veritas*, Truth, a booke being in hir hand, upon the which was written *Verbum Veritatis*, The Word of Truth.” This book was “delivered unto hir grace downe by a silken lace.” Now, “when hir grace had learned that the bible in English should there be offered: she thanked the citie therefore, promised the reading thereof most diligentlie, and incontinent commanded that it should be brought. At the receipt whereof, how reverendlie did she with both hir hands take it, kisse it, and laie it upon hir brest, to the great comfort of the lookers on^d?”

^d Hollinshed, A. D. 1559.

In the sports and diversions hitherto de- CHAP. VII.
scribed the public at large must be considered Hunting.
as spectators, while certain individuals exerted
themselves, or certain objects were exhibited,
for general amusement. But we must not
hence conclude that our ancestors in the times
here treated of were inactive. The fact was
directly the reverse. They were a strenuous
and hardy race, living much in the open air,
muscular, alert and resolved, with an eye
skilful and experienced to fix its mark, and an
arm which was rarely found recreant and un-
equal to execute its master's purpose. There
are few Englishmen so little acquainted with
their country's story, as not readily to conjure
up to themselves the stern baron and adven-
turous knight of ancient times, whom no dan-
ger could appal, and no hardship subdue; or
the firm and well-strung yeomanry, whose
nerve of mind and strength of frame had so
large a share in securing the victories of their
native isle. We are at present considering
them in relation, not to military prowess and
execution, but to those games and pastimes
which prepared them for both.

CHAP. VII.

One of the amusements of our ancestors principally entitled to our attention is hunting. This is a leading pursuit with all barbarous and half-civilised nations ; but it seems to have left in the history of no state such indelible vestiges of its operation, as in the history of England. The most memorable event connected with this topic is the formation of the New Forest by William the Conqueror, in the neighbourhood of Winchester, the seat of his principal residence. Not content with the extensive chases our kings already possessed in all parts of England, he resolved to form one larger, and with circumstances more memorable than them all. For this purpose he rigorously depopulated a district of thirty or forty miles in circumference, ruined many towns and villages, and demolished thirty-six parish-churches, to make a lair for the habitation of wild beasts*. His proceedings in the prosecution of this object are thus expressively described by the old historian. “ The cruell

* Anderson, History of Commerce, A. D. 1078.

king loved wild beasts, as though hee had CHAP.VII.
beene father of them, and by wicked counsell
he brought to passe, that where men were
wont to inhabite in townes and villages, and
where God was wont to bee honoured, there
all kinde of wilde beastes did sport themselves,
so that men saide for certaine, that for the
space of more then thirty miles, good pro-
fitable corne ground was turned into a chase;
wherein be nine walks, nine keepers, two
rangers, a bow bearer, and the earle of Ar-
nedale [Arundel] is lord warden by inhe-
ritance^f." The contemporaries of these cruel
deeds delighted to remark, that Richard the
second son of the Conqueror, during the life
of his father, William II. his third son, and
Henry one of his nephews, perished un-
timely by different accidents on this unhal-
lowed spot^g; and in these events they recog-
nised the hand of providence, avenging upon
his posterity the impiety of the tyrant^h.

^f Stow, Annals, A.D. 1086.

^g Sandford, Genealogical History.

^h It is just however to observe that the whole of this

CHAP. VII.

The penalties awarded by the Conqueror against those who invaded the privileges of his forests, were not less severe than the measures by which those forests were established. The killing a deer, a boar, or even a hare, was punished with castration and loss of the delinquent's eyesⁱ; and that at a time when the killing a man could be atoned for by paying a moderate fine or compensation.

Henry I. is celebrated for laying out the park at Woodstock, supposed to have been the first park inclosed in England, in which he placed lions, leopards, lynxes, camels, "porpentine," and other animals such as

account of the formation of the New Forest has been questioned by modern writers. Voltaire treats it as an absurdity. *Histoire Générale*, chap. xxxii. And Dr. Joseph Warton, in his Essay on Pope, remarks, "that those who have most accurately examined the ground, can discover no mark or footstep of any other place or habitation, parish or church or castle, than what at present remains." The story, if fictitious, is still apposite to illustrate the frantic eagerness with which the sports of the field were at this time pursued.

ⁱ Spelman, Gloss. sub voc. Foresta.

had never before been seen in this country ^k; CHAP.VII.
but whether for the purpose of hunting, is
uncertain. The kings of the Plantagenet race
are said to have possessed sixty-eight forests,
thirteen chases, and about seven hundred and
eighty-one parks in different parts of Eng-
land^l. All these circumstances sufficiently
prove in how serious and important a light
the occupation of hunting was viewed by the
sovereigns and nobility of the island.

Hawking was so distinguished an amuse-
ment of these early times, that, in what has
been written on the subject of ancient rural
diversions, it has often obtained the pre-
cedence over hunting itself. This amuse-
ment was in high perfection and honour
before the period of the Norman conquest:
we are told of Edward the Confessor, that
every day, after having attended divine ser-
vice, he spent a portion of his time either in
falconry or hunting^m; and Harold his suc-
Hawking.

^k Stow, Annals, A.D. 1117. ^l Spelman ubi supra.

^m Malmesbury, Lib. II, cap. 13.

CHAP.VII. cessor is represented, in the contemporary tapestry of Bayeux, as brought before William of Normandy with his hawk on his handⁿ. The education of a hawk, so as completely to prepare him for the pursuit of his quarry, was an affair of great application and uncommon ingenuity ; and the price of a bird, well trained, and that would acquit itself with credit in every trial, was extremely high. In the reign of James the First, for down to that period the diversion of hawking was still in repute, we read of one thousand pounds being given for a pair of hawks^o. A hawk was one of the most affecting marks of esteem that one gentleman could by will bequeath to another. This bird was held to be in a manner the symbol of nobility ; a man of rank rarely went any where, to war or to church, without a companion of this sort ; and nothing was considered as more dishonour-

ⁿ Montfaucon, *Monumens de la Monarchie Françoise*, Tom. I, Regne de Philippe I.

^o Strutt, Book I, chap. ii.

able to him than to part with his hawk ^{p.} CHAP. VII.

There is a pathetic tale in Boccaccio, of a young nobleman who had sacrificed every thing he possessed in pursuit of a haughty dame; and at length, as the last proof of his love, resolves to dress his hawk for her dinner.

Edward III, in whose reign Chaucer was born, had with him, when he invaded France, thirty falconers on horseback who had charge of his hawks; and he took every day the diversion of falconry or hunting¹. A statute was made in the reign of this prince, directing that any one who found a hawk, which had been lost by its owner, should carry it to the sheriff, who was to cause proclamation to be made in all the principal towns in the county, for the purpose of restoring it: if in four months no claimant appeared, the hawk was to become the property of the finder, if a gentleman, or, if a simple man, of the she-

^p Henry, Book II, chap. vii.

¹ Froissart, *Cronique de France*, Vol. I, chap. 210.

CHAP. VII. ruff, he first paying a reasonable gratuity to the man who brought him^r. Chaucer, as might be expected, is full of allusions to the art of hawking; and his poem of the Parliament of Birds, one of the first he wrote by way of courting the favour of John of Gaunt, is entirely founded upon the documents and practices of that art. The perfection to which the musquet was brought in the course of the seventeenth century, at length wholly abolished this method of pursuing the feathered natives of the woods.

Archery,

Archery was an exercise in which the English particularly excelled, and they are said to have owed their great victories of Cressy, Poitiers and Agincourt in a considerable degree to their superiority in this accomplishment. The improvement of this art had a strong tendency to supersede the importance and credit of warriors cased in complete armour, as the more modern improvements in the construction of the musquet have

^r Statutes at Large, 35 Edw. III.

since superseded the value, and continuance CHAP. VII.
of succession, of our far-famed archers.

The practice of archery was cultivated in the times here treated of, for various purposes. It was regarded as one of the principal sources of military power, of the ascendancy of any nation over its rivals, and of the strength of governments for suppressing discontent and rebellion among their subjects. It was the main qualification required in a hunter. And it was exercised by our ancestors, in instances where the destruction of neither men nor animals was in view, as a topic of friendly competition, and a method by which a man might attain the reputation of superior judgment and ingenuity among his equals. It had been particularly the practice of the citizens of London, to spend their leisure time, on holidays and other occasions, in shooting at butts, targets and wands ; and at certain memorable periods the lord-mayor, accompanied by the sheriffs and aldermen, was accustomed to lead them out into the fields, for a more solemn competition of vic-

CHAP. VII. tory and skill^a. It was a source of complaint in subsequent times, and even a topic of royal and parliamentary animadversion, that the custom of shooting with arrows was almost totally laid aside, for the pursuit of various useless and unlawful games^b. So lately as in the reign of Elizabeth a grand shooting match was held in Smithfield, attended by three thousand archers sumptuously apparelled, nine hundred and forty-two of them having chains of gold about their necks^c.

The archery of our ancestors has been rendered a topic of familiar contemplation to the lovers of English poetry, by the figure it makes in the narrative of our ancient ballads. The bow is the principal engine of destruction in the ballad of Chevy Chace. It was the great instrument of offence employed by Robin Hood, and his celebrated associates. And, in the pathetic and impressive tale of

^a Stow, Survey of London: of watches.

^b Strutt, Book II, chap. i.

^c Stow, Survey of London, by Strype, Book I, chap. 29.

William of Cloudesly^v, we have the very in- CHAP.VII.
cident recorded, with small variation, which
has since been ascribed to William Tell, and
represented as the signal for calling into ex-
istence the Helvetic liberty.

The sports of our ancestors were not merely Wrestling.
such as called for an extraordinary degree of
skill, and subjected those who pursued them
to considerable fatigue: they also comprised
every thing which was robust and athletic,
and were not untinctured with a cast of what
was savage and cruel. The diversion of wrest-
ling, the most innocent of these, is an old
English practice; so much so, that Cornwall
and other provinces of the island, to which
the ancient Britons retired on the invasion of
the Saxons, have for ages been the most ce-
lebrated for skill in this species of rivalship.

What has been styled by the writers on Prize-
fighting.
this subject "prize-fighting," and "the noble
science of defence," was much practised by
our ancestors. Sir George Buck, in treating

^v Percy, Reliques, Vol. I, Book ii.

CHAP. VII. of the different arts taught in the metropolis, says, " In this cittie there be manie professors of the Science of Defence, and very skilfull men in teaching the best and most offensive and defensive use of verie many weapons, as of the long sword, the backe sword, the rapier and dagger, the single rapier, the case of rapiers, the sword and buckler or targate, the pike, the holberd, the long staffe and other. King Henry the 8. made the professors of this art a company or corporation by letters pattents. The manner of the proceedings of our fencers in their schooles is this: first they which desire to be taught, at their admission are called scholars, and as they profit they take degrees, and proceed to bee provosts of defence; and that must be wonne by publicke triall of their proficiencie, in the presence and view of many hundreds of people: and at their next and last prize well and sufficiently performed, they doe proceede maisters of the science: the king ordeined that none but such as have thus orderly proceeded, may professe

or teach this art of defence publikely in any CHAP.VII.
part of England *.”

Sir Richard Steele in the Spectator has preserved a very entertaining specimen of the style of defiance and rejoinder in combats of this sort, which, though comparatively modern, may with propriety be introduced here by way of illustration, there being sufficient evidence that the manners of the people of England remained with scarcely any alteration in these points for centuries. Steele's paper is dated July 21, 1712.

“ I JAMES MILLER, serjeant, lately come from the frontiers of Portugal, master of the noble science of defence, hearing in most places where I have been, of the great fame of Timothy Buck of London, master of the said science, do invite him to meet me, and exercise at the several weapons following, viz.

* Third University of England, chap. 42.

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Back-sword,	Single falchion,
Sword and dagger,	Case of falchions,
Sword and buckler,	Quarter-staff."

" I TIMOTHY BUCK of Clare-market, master of the noble science of defence, hearing he did fight Mr. Parkes of Coventry, will not fail, God willing, to meet this fair inviter at the time and place appointed, desiring a clear stage and no favour.

" Vivat Regina."

Steele humorously remarks, that, " if the generous ardour in James Miller to dispute the reputation of Timothy Buck, had something resembling the old heroes of romance, Timothy Buck returned answer in the same paper with the like spirit, adding a little indignation at being challenged, and seeming to condescend to fight James Miller, not in regard to Miller himself, but in that, as the fame went about, he had fought Parkes of Coventry."

This important trial of skill took place on

the sixteenth of July 1712, and the combatants having ascended the stage, we are told, "Miller, a man of six foot eight inches height, of a kind but bold aspect, well fashioned, and ready of his limbs, had an audacious look, that took the eye: Buck a perfect composure, that engaged the judgment." Buck was the victor: and their historian observes it as "pretty remarkable, that the business of the day being a trial of skill, the popularity did not run so high as one would have expected on the side of Buck. Is it," adds he, "that people's passions have their rise in self-love, and thought themselves (in spite of all the courage they had) liable to the fate of Miller, but could not so easily think themselves qualified like Buck?"

The battle of Miller and Buck, as usually happened in combats of this sort, was fought on a spot commonly known by the appellation of a Bear-garden. The scenes, for the exhibition of which such structures were prepared, were regarded with great partiality and attachment by our ancestors, as well as

Bear and
bull bait-
ing.

CHAP. VII. by their contemporary nations in every quarter of Europe. They are enumerated among the pastimes of the metropolis by Fitzstephen. "A terrible slaughter" is recorded to have happened at a place called Paris Garden, on the southern bank of the Thames, in the year 1581, where a great multitude of people had assembled to partake of these amusements, and all the scaffolds erected for their reception fell down in the same instant^x. Queen Elizabeth displayed a singular partiality for the exhibitions of bear-baiting and bull-baiting: the former made a part of the entertainments presented to her at Kenelworth; and both were repeatedly the diversions to which, by way of manifesting the cordiality of her sentiments, she invited ambassadors sent to her from foreign courts^y.

Cruel and enormous as these sports were, in which the animal assailed, being staked to the ground, was often mangled in the most terrible manner, or had his tongue torn up

^x Stow, Survey of London, by Strype, Book I, chap. 31.

^y Strutt, Book III, chap. vi.

by the roots, without awakening the con-CHAP.VII.
ductors of the diversion to clemency; and
in which the dogs were sometimes hewed
limb from limb, to prove the soundness of
their breed; they continued to obtain a cer-
tain degree of favour, after the manners of
the nation were too far refined properly to
coalesce with them. For this they were in-
debted to the character of the persons who
showed themselves the most irreconcilable
enemies of these amusements, the ancient
Puritans. Influenced by this consideration,
the author of Hudibras is inclined to treat a
taste for bear-baiting as the token of a frank
disposition and a loyal temper: and more
modern politicians, alarmed at certain recent
examples of innovation, have taught that such
sports are a becoming school for courage,
generosity and benevolence, and a pledge for
our retaining among us the virtues of our
ancient character².

The fighting of cocks, and the practice of Cock-fight-
ing and

² Parliamentary Debates, May 24, 1802.

CHAP.VII. throwing at cocks. setting up a cock to be thrown at on certain holidays, are not less ancient, and scarcely less inhuman, than the diversions last mentioned. It is painful to recollect that human beings ever found relaxation and sport in such exhibitions; but they belong to a particular stage in the progress of civilisation, and our picture of the manners of our ancestors would be imperfect, if they were passed over in silence.

Robbery.

A feature belonging to the portrait of these times, and which, in the forms that it assumed, grew out of some of the diversions already enumerated, was the audacious and alarming practice of public robbery. The yeomanry of England were in these times every where trained up to the use of the long-bow, and excelled all other nations in the art of shooting. At the same time the forest-laws, introduced by our Norman kings from their attachment to the chace, were enormously severe, and the temptation to the infringement of them singularly strong. These circumstances necessarily produced a numerous and continual succession of out-

laws, especially of those who were the best CHAP.VII.
marksmen. Such were our Robin Hood, who
died about the year 1247, and his followers.
Such were Adam Bell and William of
Cloudesly, whose ballad-history we had
lately occasion to refer to.

In the reigns of weak princes the evil
grew to a more alarming extent; and, though
a considerable difference may be allowed in
this point between the period of a feeble and
a vigorous administration, yet we may infer
from the depredations committed in the worst
times, what were the propensities habitually
existing in that state of society. A curious
picture in this respect is given by Matthew
Paris in the reign of Henry III, and that
even in the most tranquil period of that
monarch. Two merchants of Brabant came
to the king at Winchester, and complained
that they had been robbed in open day, and
by persons whom they saw familiarly at court.
They offered to prove their charge by single
combat. The persons accused were appre-
hended, but were suffered to clear themselves
by producing compurgators, who solemnly

CHAP. VII vouched on oath for the innocence of the defendants. The Brabanters however were not so put to silence; they adhered to their point, and threatened that, if they did not obtain justice, their sovereign should take vengeance upon the English merchants resident in his dominions. The king, moved at their importunity, by the advice of his council appointed a grand jury to enquire into the state of the police in Winchester and its neighbourhood. The jury, after long deliberation and much anxiety, declared they were unable to make any discoveries; and the king, exasperated at their obstinacy, threw them into prison, and threatened to have them immediately hanged. A second jury was inclosed, who, intimidated by the fate of their predecessors, at length thought proper to make a full disclosure, and impeached many persons who, for their wealth, or their connection with the court, were most free from suspicion. Of these thirty were immediately hanged; those belonging to the household declaring, that to the king they might justly ascribe their unhappy des-

tiny, as he by detaining from them the wages CHAP.VII. of their service, had reduced them to the necessity of having recourse to rapine for a subsistence^a.

In the more vigorous reign of Edward III. we are not without examples of audacious robbery; and among them one particularly insisted upon by the historians was committed upon Peter king of Cyprus in the year 1363, when that prince, who was repeatedly a visitor to this island, was attacked, and stripped of a considerable property, by a gang of ruffians^b.

The character of Robin Hood and the outlaws of these early ages, when a proper allowance has been made for the violence of

^a Matt. Paris, ad ann. 1249.

^b Walsingham, *Historia Brevis*, ad ann. This circumstance has been whimsically misstated by modern historians. Hume says, that he was robbed and stripped, "with his whole retinue." Barnes observes, that he was robbed, "as he rode about here in England, with a small attendance in confidence of king Edward's protection." Walsingham, the only authority to which they refer, mentions none of these circumstances.

CHAP. VII. an occupation to which the impolitic severity of the laws compelled them, was not such as to awaken in us much disapprobation. It has often been observed, that the robbers of England have shown themselves generous, merciful and humane beyond those of most other countries; and, if the ill sound of the proposition may be forgiven, we may perhaps make no unjust conclusion as to the virtues of the old English character, from the manners of Robin Hood and his coadjutors. They “continued in woods,” we are told, “dispoyling and robbing the goods of the rich. They killed none but such as would invade them, or by resistance for their owne defence. The saide Robert intertained an hundred tall men and good archers with such spoiles and theftes as he got, upon whom foure hundred, were they never so strong, durst not give the onset. Hee suffered no woman to bee oppressed, violated, or otherwise molested: poore mens goods hee spared, abundantlie relieving them with that, which by thefte he gotte from abbeies and the houses of riche carles: who may be blamed for his

rapine and theft, but of all theeves hee was CHAP.VII.
the prince and the most gentle theefe^c.”

Accordingly we find that he is constantly the hero of the ballads which were made of his adventures; and his name has at all times been in honour with the good people of England.

Most of the diversions already spoken of Tournam-
ments.
tend more to familiarise, than to grace in our conceptions, the persons of our ancestors. The case is far different with the justs and the tournaments, which remain to be mentioned. These are intimately connected with those modes and prejudices of chivalry, to which modern Europe is indebted for the particulars by which she is most distinguished from the nations of the ancient world. The principles of honour and the laws of gallantry are the offspring of the darker ages and the feudal times; and the tournament was one of the most conspicuous of the modes by which these principles and

* Stow, Annals, A. D. 1189.

CHAP. VII. laws were maintained. Whatever objections may be urged against the train of thinking in our ancestors on these points, and whatever solidity there may be in some of these objections, it cannot be denied that the theories of honour and gallantry were fraught with many advantages; and still less can it be denied that the actions and habits which flowed from them, are of the most poetical cast, and deeply interesting to the imagination. The education of a candidate for knighthood, the sentiments with which he was imbued, his lofty courage, his unstained truth, the loyalty and ingenuousness of his mind, the enthusiastic veneration he entertained for female beauty when united with female virtue, and the vocation he felt in himself to be ever ready in the service of the oppressed, combine to present to us one of the most pleasing and honourable forms of which the human mind is susceptible. Relatively to the present manners of Europe, and the progress which has since taken place in society, the profession of chivalry is an abuse; it is allied to ignorance, extravagance

of sentiment, and a too prompt appeal to the CHAP.VII.
sword: but what is now antiquated, or would
now be censurable, has its appropriate place
in the history of mankind, and was once com-
mendable, beneficial and virtuous.

Out of the system and prejudices of chivalry arose the duel: and out of the duel, or serious contention between man and man for character or for life, arose by a very obvious modification the just, in which men, under the forms of animosity and anger, contended in reality only for superiority of skill. No art or trade can be well learned without much application and exercise; and the nearer the preparatory exercise comes to the ultimate purpose, the more accomplished will the pupil be found in the occupation he studies. It was this conviction which first gave birth to the just and the tournament; and it was the propensity, characteristic of illiterate ages, to feats of activity and splendour of exhibition, which nourished them to perfection.

The difference between the just and the tournament is said to have consisted in this, that the just was an amicable contention for

CHAP. VII. superiority in arms between two persons only, and that in the tournament a great number of persons were arrayed on either side, and rushed together to a miscellaneous conflict^d. This statement however is scarcely accurate. The just is rather to be considered as a part of the tournament, which, as the term is ordinarily used by historians, comprised a variety of successive exhibitions, the justs usually taking place after the grand tournamental game was finished. It is reasonable in the mean time to consider the miscellaneous conflict as the essence of the tournament; and the sports with which it was combined as non-essential appendages.

The tournament, particularly the grand miscellaneous conflict, was attended with so many fatal accidents, and was regarded as of so perilous a nature, that the celebration of it was for a long time prohibited in England. It was invented on the continent, and practised in France and Germany, previously to

^d Du Cange, in voc. Justa.

the Norman conquest^e: but it was not till CHAP.VII.
 the troublesome reign of king Stephen, when,
 in consequence of the anarchy created by the
 hostile pretenders to the crown, almost every
 petty baron in turn shook off the yoke of
 allegiance, that the English nobility ventured
 to naturalise it in this country^f.

With regard to show and visual magnifi-
 cence, the point of view in which we are
 here considering them, it is difficult to con-
 ceive any thing more happily imagined than
 the ancient tournaments. They produced,
 like the Grecian games of old, a continual
 exercise, and image of themselves, in places
 of private resort, and in the domain of every
 baron, by way of training the candidates to
 that degree of agility and skill, which it was
 necessary to display on these far-famed thea-
 tres of honour and renown. Not a week,
 not a day passed, in which he who was
 curious in these spectacles might not witness

Description
 of the
 tourna-
 ment.

^e Du Cange, in voc. Torneamentum.

^f William of Newbury, apud Henry, Book III, chap. 7.

CHAP. VII. the shock of lances and the clash of swords.

When the time arrived for which every young adventurer in arms so eagerly panted, when, under the auspices of the king, or the most considerable nobility of the land, a grand tournament was to be celebrated, the first ceremony which took place was for each combatant to deliver in his name to the heralds and pursuivants at arms appointed for that purpose, and to hang up his achievement within the walls of some neighbouring monastery. Here it was inspected by every one who resorted as a spectator to this magnificent game; the merits and qualities of the champion were canvassed; and it was customary, if any lady thought she had ground of complaint against him, for her to touch his escutcheon, which was the appointed mode of bringing an accusation, and provoking an instant investigation. No one could enter the lists, unless he possessed the proper rank and qualifications, unless he were approved by the judges of the field, and unless his character and actions were free from stain.

The day for the celebration having come,

the scene of combat was found prepared, CHAP. VII.
together with a variety of accommodations
and stages for the spectators and the ladies.
The ladies constituted one of the most im-
portant parts of the scene. It is well known
with what deference and worship they were
regarded during the reign of chivalry. They
were adorned with the utmost magnificence
and expence; they took a deep interest in the
fortune of the champion whom they hon-
oured with their favour; they presented him
with tokens (a scarf, a bracelet, a locket of
hair, or, as it is expressed by Chaucer in
his story of Troilus, a “pencil of their
sleeve”^s), by means of which his person was
recognised in all the vehemence of the con-
flict, clothed as he was in complete armour,
and his beaver down. Various occasions
were contrived in which the ladies were ap-
pealed to, and their interposition claimed;
they were in some instances the judges of
the combat; and it was from their hands

^s Book V, vers. 1043.

CHAP. VII. that the victor received the prize for which he had contended.

The spectators being at length arranged, the show began. The sound of trumpets announced the arrival of the cavaliers. They advanced with a slow and majestic pace, attended by their squires, also on horseback, and followed by a multitude of pages and serjeants, whose office it was to assist the combatants, to supply them with arms, and to contain the populace in silence and respect. The judges and heralds had their eyes continually upon the champions, prepared to observe and report with fidelity every incident of the field. A multitude of minstrels, furnished with every instrument of martial music, were at hand, to celebrate the acts of prowess which might distinguish the day. No sooner had a master-stroke taken place in any instance, than the music sounded, the heralds proclaimed it aloud, and a thousand shouts, echoed from man to man, made the air resound with the name of the hero. The combatants rewarded the proclaimers of their feats in proportion to the vehemence and

loudness of their cries ; and their liberalities CHAP.VII.
produced yet other cries, still preserved in
the customs of our husbandmen at their
harvest-home, deafening the ear with the
reiteration of *largesse*. In fine, the victor
was disarmed, after the dust and labour of
the field, by the hands of some of the most
distinguished fair, was attired in the splendid
habits of peace, and conducted to the most
honourable seat in the midst of illustrious
princes and crowned monarchs. The modesty
and simplicity of demeanour which was one
of the most cogent lessons of chivalry, and
the forbearance and generosity the cavaliers
were taught to exercise toward their defeated
antagonists, served to temper the pride and
ostentation of the victors in these combats,
which would otherwise have been inordinate
and intolerable ^h.

The concourse and parade with which ^{Examples.}
tournaments were celebrated in the days of
chivalry, are such as almost to surpass belief.

^h St. Palaye, Partie II.

CHAP. VII. In the tournament of Beaucaire, proclaimed by our Henry II. in 1174, we are told that no less than ten thousand knights, beside ladies and other spectators, graced the exhibition with their presence and their prowessⁱ.

Edward I, perhaps the ablest and most accomplished of the line of our English monarchs, was in the vigour of his age not less enamoured of these grand tournamental displays, than of the more tragic scenes of battle and death. It was not easy to give a stronger proof of this than he did when, returning from the Holy Land, and being pressed by the necessity of composing his dominions after the weak and turbulent reign of his father, he nevertheless accepted the invitation of the count of Chalons in Burgundy to assist with his knights at a magnificent tournament to be solemnised at that place. The count, it seems, had invited the king with no hospitable intention; and accordingly, in the

ⁱ Henry, Book III, chap. vii.

commencement of the action, singled out his CHAP.VII. guest, pierced through the troop of his companions, and, strongly grasping his neck, endeavoured to hurl him to the ground. Edward put spurs to his horse, and hurried his antagonist from his saddle across the field; then with a single jerk loosened his hold, and tossed him upon the plain. This scuffle produced a considerable degree of anger in the count's followers; every thing appeared tumultuous and stormy; and the action would presently have become sanguinary, had not the Burgundian prudently appeased his people, and given up the contest ^k.

But the reign of Edward III, under which Chaucer passed the principal part of his life, is to be considered as the grand epoch of tournaments in England. This constitutes a great and considerably striking period in the history of chivalry. The genuine institutions of knighthood had been the growth of a more ferocious age: they were contemporary with

^k Walsingham, A.D. 1274.

CHAP. VII. acts of the most savage violence, when no innocence was safe, when no right was sacred, when law was feeble, and political power inadequate to the suppression of daring crimes : and they constituted for a time the most suitable and effectual remedy to these evils. But, after a certain interval, they ceased to be of equal moment : even the soundness of the remedy tended ultimately to render its application unnecessary ; and the growth of knowledge and the progress of civilisation gave greater energy to the principles of social order. Yet, when the practices of chivalry were no longer indispensable, the ideas in which it was founded did not immediately perish. Its magnificent displays and its gracious manners had won the hearts of mankind ; and, when it ceased to be the support, it became the ornament of society.

This was precisely the form it assumed in the time of Chaucer. Edward III. was perhaps no great politician ; but he was a great lover of whatever was magnificent and impressive. His magnificence was not disorderly and absurd : it certainly had no absurdity

of a nature which his subjects in general were CHAP.VII. qualified to detect. If he was not profound, he had at least an understanding sufficiently solid to command the respect of his contemporaries and neighbours. He was a prince of an ardent and enterprising temper, of a graceful and majestic deportment, and of a liberal and munificent mind. He was therefore exactly adapted to encounter the sort of fortune which we find he actually encountered ; to be honoured and revered in what may be called his better days ; but to be regarded with some degree of neglect, when the vigour of his frame, and the juvenility of his spirit had deserted him. He had sons like himself, generous as he was, courteous and gallant, turning their ambition in the same direction and characterised by nearly the same defects as their father. The consequences of his military exploits were memorable enough to buoy up the greatness of his name ; and the splendour of his court and the profusion of his festivals seemed to all men to be such as best accorded with the dignity of so mighty a conqueror.

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It would be tedious to attempt in this place a catalogue of the tournaments which distinguished the reign of this sovereign. Some idea may be formed on the subject from a statement of so much as belongs to it in the records of a single year, the year 1348, a short time subsequent to the victory of Cressy. In the compass of this year magnificent tournaments were held at Canterbury, Eltham, London, Westminster, Winchester, Lincoln, Windsor and other places¹.

Orders of
the Round
Table and
of the
Garter.

Intimately connected with the tournaments and military shows of this period was the institution of certain new, splendid and select orders of knighthood. When Edward III. was preparing, in the year 1344, for his principal attack upon France, one of the expedients which occurred to him by way of giving eclat and effect to his expedition, was to proclaim for the commencement of that year a solemn tournament, to which he in-

¹ Barnes, History of Edward III, Book II, chap. vii, §. 3. Wardrobe Rolls, apud Warton, Vol. I, sect. vii.

vited combatants from France, Burgundy, CHAP.VII.
Flanders, Brabant and Germany ; purposing
from the knights whose prowess on this oc-
casion should be the most approved, to select
the members of his new order, to be styled
knights of the Round Table^m. Philip de
Valois his competitor, alarmed at this mea-
sure of the English sovereign, issued a strict
prohibition to his subjects to obey the in-
vitation, proclaimed a tournament to be so-
lemnised at Paris at the same time with that
of Edward, and instituted a Round Table in
imitation of the English monarch. Edward
was thus in some degree baffled in the mag-
nificent scheme he had projected ; and, find-
ing on the experiment, that the foreign
warriors upon whom he conferred his new
order, did not consider themselves so far
bound by the distinction as to prevent them
from taking the side of his opponent in the
ensuing war, he five years afterward new-

^m Ashmole, Institution of the Garter, Chap. V, sect. ii.
Barnes, Book 1, chap. xxii, §. 3.

CHAP.VII modelled his plan, confined the catalogue of its members principally to the natives of his own dominions, and celebrated its institution with great solemnity, under the appellation of the order of the Garterⁿ.

Conclusion. From what has been stated in this chapter respecting the diversions of the fourteenth century, it may be inferred that our ancestors of that period were active ; sturdy ; fond of humour, but exceedingly gross and blunt in their conceptions of it ; and passionately devoted to whatever was calculated to impress the senses, in the mode either of turbulent or harmonious sounds, of gaudy and variegated colours, or of solemn and magnificent display and ostentation.

ⁿ Ashmole, ubi supra.

CHAP. VIII.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

—GOTHIC ORDERS OF BUILDING.—ANCIENT CASTLES.—PALACES AND MANOR-HOUSES.

IN several preceding chapters we have been engaged in considering the various objects, institutions, inventions and practices, which were likely to have presented themselves early to the view of our poet, and essentially to have modified his conceptions and character. A most important branch of this topic must consist in a review, however imperfect, of the state of the fine arts in the fourteenth century. The buildings, the images, the paintings and the music of his country could not fail to be continually obtruding themselves upon the senses of Chaucer, and to form an essential part of his education. The

CHAP.
VIII.

CHAP.
VIII.

present chapter therefore shall be devoted to a sketch of the history of architecture, and the succeeding one to that of sculpture, painting and music, so far as they are obviously connected with our subject.

Attention
paid to
this art.

There is probably no age in the history of the world in which the art of building was more assiduously and extensively cultivated, than in the period which elapsed from the Norman conquest to the birth of Chaucer. This was owing to two principal causes, the insecurity of social life in general, and the flourishing and prosperous condition of the church. The former of these led to the erection of fortresses, and the latter of churches, convents and abbeys.

Military ar-
chitec-
ture.

Never in any other age or country did so many arguments cooperate to persuade the erection of fortresses. The Norman invaders had no sooner obtained possession of the soil, than they spread themselves over the whole surface of the country, and lived separate and insulated from each other, in the midst of a people upon whom they trampled,

and by whom they were detested in return. CHAP.
VIII.

A Norman baron therefore had no security ===== against the superior population of the conquered race, but what essentially depended upon his battlements, his portcullis, his moat and his draw-bridge. No sooner had this expedient been adopted in relation to the subjugated Saxons, than the haughty chieftain of the feudal ages found that it was not less adapted to gratify his passions, in defying his equal, and, as occasion might demand, in resisting the claims or incroachments of his rightful lord. With these obvious motives an incidental consideration strongly concurred. The art of attack had not yet been so improved, as to reach its present superiority over the art of defence. A ditch and a wall, such as the Norman times produced, would be found at present a feeble means of resistance; but in these early centuries they were truly formidable. The consequence of all these considerations was that, under the first princes of the Norman race in England, the whole kingdom is represented by their historians to have "been

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VIII.

covered with castles^a ;” and, in the turbulent reign of king Stephen, no fewer than eleven hundred and fifteen castles are said to have been erected from their foundation in the short space of nineteen years^b.

Religious
architec-
ture.

Nor was the building of monasteries, convents and churches a passion much less universal in these ages, than the building of fortresses. The celibacy of the clergy was a dogma of recent establishment, and this dogma led in a variety of ways to the advancement and extension of the science of architecture. The monks, who had before been indulged at pleasure in the permission to marry^c, had no sooner universally submitted to the injunction of celibacy, than they became more holy in the eyes of the laity, and more enthusiastical and devout in their personal habits and feelings. Their superior credit and zeal essentially tended to

^a Chron. Saxon. apud Henry, Book III, chap. v, §. 1.

^b Diceto, apud Decem Scriptores, A.D. 1153. Registrum Prioratus de Dunstaple, apud Grose's Antiquities, Preface.

^c Hume, Chap. II.

increase the multitude of votaries in their
respective convents, as well as the number
of separate monastic establishments in the
different countries of Europe. The habitations
of the religious were thus rendered at once
more numerous and more ample. Their
number was calculated to subtilise and im-
prove the science of building in the minds of
its professors ; and the spaciousness required
in the different receptacles of this sort, gave
scope for the persons employed in erecting or
enlarging them, to exemplify the ideas which
their reflections engendered.

Frequent have been the occasions we have
had to observe that the policy of the clergy, in
those ages when the power of the church was
most stupendous, particularly aimed at striking
the senses. The task of the leaders of sects
and religious denominations in later times has
been complicated ; it has been necessary to
agitate the passions by means of eloquent
representations, and to seem at least to con-
vince the understanding : the task of these
earlier fathers of the church was perfectly
simple. Accordingly, in the darkest period

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of the middle ages, much attention was paid to the building of cathedrals and places of public devotion; and while, among our Saxon ancestors, persons of the highest rank were content to gratify their appetites and consume their wealth in a species of hovels, God and his saints were lodged with comparative magnificence. This magnificence, like every other refinement of civilised life, was greatly improved and exalted under the reign of the Normans. The wealth of the church was immense; and the religious policy of the times required that a great portion of it should be expended in the exercise of beneficence, and the prosecution of apparently disinterested views. Among these religious architecture occupied a foremost place. It afforded to the dignified ecclesiastic an honourable occupation; it enabled him to convince the unlearned and the vulgar of the superiority of his intellect; and it gratified his thirst for contemporary and posthumous fame.

Early Gothic style.

The religious architecture of the middle ages naturally divides itself into two prin-

cipal classes, which are perhaps best known CHAP.
VIII.
 by the denominations of the early and the latter Gothic. The term Gothic is indeed modern, and was probably first applied by the passionate admirers of classic architecture with a view of expressing their contempt. There seems however to be no sufficient reason for rejecting the appellation. The cultivators of the early Gothic architecture distinguished it by the name of Roman; but it was not the Roman, such as had been practised in the times of Augustus, but such as had prevailed in the decline of the empire, and particularly after the invasion of the Goths^d. This style of building was brought cultivated
by the
Saxons.
 over into Britain by the priests who converted our Saxon ancestors to the Christian faith: Wilfred bishop of York and afterward of Hexham, and Biscop abbot of Weremouth, both of them luminaries of the seventh century, are celebrated for the zeal

^d Bentham, History of Ely Cathedral, Introduction, §. vi.

CHAP.
VIII. and intelligence with which they cultivated it: and several specimens of architecture, by no means contemptible, appear to have been produced in the era of the Saxons^c. The complaints which we read of the destruction of monasteries by the Danes are a proof both of the number and importance of these edifices. Alfred however, who checked the progress of the Danes, is said to have introduced some improvements into the architecture previously practised; and, under the early princes of the Norman race, the elder Gothic was carried to the utmost degree of excellence it ever attained.

The characteristic marks of the elder Gothic are the massiveness of its pillars, and the circular form given to its arches. The churches built by Wilfred and Biscop appear to have been of a simple quadrangular form, a little rounded at the eastern end, and composed of a nave, with two side ailes divided from the nave on each side by a line

^c Bentham, §. v.

of columns. In the age of Alfred an addition CHAP.
VIII.
 was made to this plan, of a transept, or
 cross-building, intersecting the whole; and
 of towers, erected for the purpose of receiving
 the large and ponderous bells which it now
 first became the custom to affix in places of
 religious worship ^f.

The Normans made no essential alteration improved
by the
Normans
 in this plan; but they built their more con-
 siderable religious edifices on a much larger
 scale than the Saxons, and elevated their roofs
 to a much greater height; so that, while
 the eminent Saxon churches were usually
 finished in five or six years, it seldom hap-
 pened that the Norman prelates were not
 obliged to bequeath the completion of their
 designs to the pious care of their succes-
 sors ^g. A further consequence of the enlarged
 plan also was, that the walls were made more
 solid, and the pillars more ponderous; and
 there can be need of little argument to con-
 vince any reflecting observer, that an increase

^f Bentham, §. v. ^g Bentham, §. vi.

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VIII.

of size, and height, and mass, will as essentially change the impression of any building upon the spectator, as the substitution of a totally different species of architecture. The Normans were incredibly expensive and zealous in their passion for sacred edifices ; and accordingly we find that all our cathedrals, and most of our abbey-churches and an innumerable multitude of parochial ones, were either wholly rebuilt or greatly improved within less than a century after the conquest^h.

Latter Gothic style.

Such are the principal facts which offer themselves to our observation in the history of the elder Gothic. The rage for religious architecture however which marked these times, had the further effect of engendering in the minds of those who studied it a totally different species of building, called the latter Gothic. Much dispute has arisen, and many hypotheses have been formed as to the origin of this style ; and, while some have derived

^h Bentham, §. vi.

it from Asia through the medium of the crusadersⁱ, and others from the Morescoes CHAP.
VIII.
 in Spain, there have not been wanting writers who, misled by the ambiguity of the name, have ascribed it to the Gothic conquerors of Rome^k, though in reality it did not exist till some centuries after the name of Goth had perished in Europe. But, beside the total want of evidence in support of every one of these hypotheses, it has been well observed^l, that the gradual steps by which we can perceive it to have arisen demonstrate it to have been the genuine offspring of the western world. If it had been imported from any other quarter of the globe, we might reasonably have expected it to have shown itself in full perfection among us at once. The first symptoms of its existence in Europe were in this island; and there seems therefore to be some ground for regarding it as the

ⁱ Parentalia, or Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens; Life of sir C. W. Sect. viii.

^k Warburton, Notes on Pope's Epistles, Ep. IV, ver. 29.

^l Milner, History of Winchester, Vol. II, chap. vi.

CHAP.
VIII.

invention of the Normans, and for adding it as one more feature to that elevated, enterprising and capable character, by which they shone with such distinguished lustre amidst the darkness of the middle ages.

The period of greatest prosperity of the elder Gothic was during the space of a century immediately after the Norman conquest. The latter Gothic took its rise in the middle of the twelfth century, appeared in great splendour during the thirteenth, and continued to be the ruling style, with such variations as are incident to all human designs, to the time of the reformation^m. The great characteristic of the latter Gothic is the pointed arch: beside which it is distinguished by the slenderness of its pillars, the vaultings of its roofs formed by the successive intersections of curves, and the prominent buttresses on the outside of its walls. An ingenious writer on this subjectⁿ has ascribed the invention of the pointed arch to Henry

^m Bentham, §. vi.

ⁿ Milner, ubi supra.

of Blois bishop of Winchester, brother to king Stephen. About the same time with the invention of this style of architecture, came into practice the use of painted glass in the windows, producing the happiest and most solemn effect in the inside of their buildings ; and of spires and pinnacles, contributing in a high degree to their ornament without^o. The greatest improvement which afterward took place, was that, while, in the reign of Henry III. and the commencement of the latter Gothic, the windows were long and narrow, in the reign of Edward II. were introduced those large east and west windows, which, with their transparent representations of apostles, saints and martyrs, form one of the most striking and impressive ornaments of our English collegiate churches and cathedrals^p. The latter Gothic had always a strong propensity to embellishment ; and the longer it continued, the more glaring did this propensity become : so that in the fifteenth century,

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VIII.

* Bentham, §. vi.

* Bentham, §. vi.

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VIII.

its delicate fret-work, and decorations like embroidery, if they did not calm and awe the soul, had at least an obvious operation in astonishing and bewildering the sense. The style of building here described may perhaps with sufficient propriety retain the name of the latter Gothic, since it was engrafted, as a real or supposed improvement, upon that species of architecture which attained its permanent character during the period when the Goths had gained their highest degree of ascendancy in Italy and other portions of Europe.

Such were some of the objects which were so numerous in the time of Chaucer, and were regarded with so high a degree of veneration, that they could not without glaring injustice be omitted in a review of the different appearances by which his youthful mind was modified and impressed. He had an opportunity of contemplating both the orders of architecture here spoken of in the fullest excellence they ever attained. The generality of English cathedrals were in the elder taste; and the latter Gothic had attained a sufficient

degree of attention and popularity, to enable it to present very numerous specimens to the eye of the youthful poet.

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VIII.

Since the time of Chaucer and the period of the reformation, the study of Grecian architecture has been revived; and it has not failed to excite and engross the commendations of the connoisseurs and the learned. It undoubtedly possesses many advantages over the architecture of our Gothic ancestors. It is infinitely more graceful, beautiful and sweet; its symmetry is more exact, and its simplicity more perfect; it has a more finished character; it is highly congenial to a tasteful, a refined and a polished mind.

Gothic and
Grecian
architec-
ture com-
pared.

But, in spite of these recommendations, the edifices of our ancestors may boldly present themselves, and challenge the comparison. They are more religious. They possess infinitely more power to excite the passions, and generate an enthusiastic spirit. We admire more the Grecian style of building; we feel more from the Gothic. The Grecian is like the poetry of an Augustan age; it is harmonious, mellowed, uniformly majestic, and

CHAP. VIII. gently persuasive. The Gothic is like the
===== poetry of a ruder and more daring period.
The artist does not stoop to conform himself to elaborate rules ; he yields to the native suggestions of his sublime and untutored fancy ; he astonishes the observer and robs him of himself ; and the heart of man acknowledges more occasions of sympathy, of affection and feeling in his productions, than in the laboured and accurate performances of a more enlightened age.

The cause of this advantage on the side of the Gothic style is partly the bolder dimensions, of the pillars in the early Gothic, of the height of the roof in the latter Gothic, and of length in both. The uniformity too of the columns and arches produces an artificial infinite in the mind of the spectator. All that the eye can take in at once, however great and magnificent, quickly produces satiety ; but, when the sight has wandered along the vast and unterminable extent of the nave of an ancient cathedral, and then discovers two parallel ailes of equal length and magnificence with the nave itself, after

which it is gradually led to the cross ailes and other compartments of the stupendous edifice, CHAP.
VIII.
 it is impossible that the mind should not experience a degree of elevation and delight, which scarcely any other production of human art can generate. Add to these causes the solemn gloom which pervades these venerable structures, and the glowing effect, blending with the gloom, which is produced by the rich and transparent colours of the windows; and no one can any longer reasonably wonder that the Gothic style of building should exercise so commanding a power over every pious mind, and every lover of the sublime, the mysterious and the awful, of all that plunges the soul in boundless reverie, and leads us to an inexplicable communication with the invisible, the infinite, and the dead.

Having in some degree compared the Grecian and the Gothic architecture, it is natural for us to indulge in a brief comparison of the two different classes of the Gothic style. They may most decisively be estimated by an inspection of both; but, as I cannot lead every one of my readers into

Early and
latter Go-
thic com-
pared.

CHAP.
VIII.

an old English cathedral of each of these kinds, let us endeavour to visit them in fancy, and by that means to calculate the impression of each. The latter Gothic is undoubtedly a “light, neat, and elegant form of building¹ ;” but in these qualities it cannot perhaps enter into a strict competition with the Grecian style. Its slender pillars may possess various excellences, but they are certainly not magnificent ; and the shafts by which the pillars are frequently surrounded, have an insignificant air, suggesting to us an idea of fragility, and almost reminding us of the humble vehicle through which an English or German rustic inhales the fumes of the Indian weed. The tendency of the latter Gothic, as has been already said, is to excess of ornament ; and some of its structures, tombs for example, which belong to the century immediately before the reformation, have rather the appearance of toys to decorate a lady’s chamber, than of monuments, the figure of which

¹ Bentham, §. vi.

should excite ideas of duration, and generate in the mind a solemn and an awful sentiment. CHAP.
VIII.

The elder Gothic is undoubtedly free from all the faults which have been here pointed out in its immediate successor. The gigantic pillars, the substantial roofs, and the massy walls of a cathedral built in this style, at once strike us with the idea of an edifice coeval with the world. There is a sumptuous and proud magnificence in a cathedral such as that of Durham, which infinitely surpasses the light and pleasant style of the cathedrals of the thirteenth century. The expanded dimension of its parts compels us to shrink into our littleness, and to feel as if we were rather among those grand, fantastic scenes which are produced by the stupendous sports of nature, than among the works of human art. It must have been a cathedral of this sort which the poet had in his mind, when he penned that admirable description:

No, all is hush'd, and still as death.—'Tis
dreadful!—

How reverend is the face of this tall pile;

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VIII.

Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made stedfast and im-
moveable,
Looking tranquillity^r!

The latter Gothic however possesses many excellences purely its own. Such are its spires and pinnacles ; its painted glass ; and its immense windows east and west, adapted to exhibit the full effect of this art. Those buildings in which these advantages should be employed, without any other deviation from the style of architecture in vogue in the reign of Henry I, would perhaps prove the most perfect specimen of a religious edifice which the mind of man has yet invented.

There is an exquisite passage in the writings of bishop Warburton, in which, if that extraordinary genius has indulged a little too exuberantly the impulse of his fancy, he at least has illustrated with great happiness and

^r Congreve, Mourning Bride, Act 1, Scene .

beauty the spirit of the modern Gothic style. CHAP.
VIII.
“ Having been accustomed,” says he, “ dur-
ing the gloom of paganism, to worship the
Deity in GROVES (a practice common to all
nations) When their new Religion required
covered edifices, they [*the Gothic conquerors
of Spain*] ingeniously projected to make them
resemble *Groves*, as nearly as the distance of
architecture would permit. Hence no at-
tentive observer ever viewed a regular Avenue
of well-grown trees intermixing their branches
over head, but it presently put him in mind
of the long Visto through a Gothic Cathe-
dral; or ever entered one of the larger and
more elegant Edifices of this kind, but it re-
presented to his imagination an Avenue of
trees. Under this idea of so extraordinary a
species of Architecture, all the irregular trans-
gressions against art, all the monstrous offences
against nature, disappear; every thing has its
reason, every thing is in order, and an har-
monious Whole arises from the studious ap-
plication of means proper and proportioned
to the end. For could the *Arches* be otherwise

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than *pointed*, when the Workman was to imitate that curve which branches make by their intersection with one another? Or could the *Columns* be otherways than split into distinct shafts, when they were to represent the Stems of a group of Trees? On the same principle was formed the spreading ramification of the stone-work in the windows, and the stained glass in the interstices; the one being to represent the branches, and the other the leaves of an opening Grove; and both concurring to preserve that gloomy light inspiring religious horror. Lastly, we see the reason of their studied aversion to *apparent* solidity in these stupendous masses, deemed so absurd by men accustomed to the *apparent* as well as *real* strength of Grecian Architecture. Had it been only a wanton exercise of the Artist's skill, to shew he could give real strength without the appearance of any, we might indeed admire his superior science, but we must needs condemn his ill judgment. But when one considers, that this surprising lightness was necessary to complete the execution of

his idea of a rural place of worship, one cannot sufficiently admire the ingenuity of the contrivance^s.”

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The architecture of the habitations and castles of our ancestors is less calculated to afford instances of any particular order of building, capable of vying in some respects with the orders of ancient Greece, than the architecture of their religious edifices; but it is of the utmost importance as tending to illustrate their modes of living and the temper of their minds. This subject comes even more immediately home to human feelings than the preceding. The sight of a ruin takes a stronger hold upon our fancy, than that of a complete building even of the same age. A ruin suggests to us forcibly the idea of men and scenes passed away, and entirely removed from the theatre of the world, which a complete building does not. The devotion of one age much more nearly resembles the devotion of another, than the habits, the

Ancient
castles.

^s Warburton, ubi supra.

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VIII.

===== customs and the manners ; and therefore can never impress the mind with that notion of individual and contradistinguished existence, which we derive from the private life of other times. Add to which ; though devotion is a striking and interesting sentiment, it is a sentiment which less forcibly seizes upon our sympathies than some others. In devotion the worshipper endeavours to rise out of himself, and to put off human weaknesses and frailties, and consequently many of the most characteristic marks of our nature ; but, when we see the ancient baron in the midst of his family, or surrounded by his dependants, personating the state and munificence of a little sovereign, presiding at the genial board, or leading the exercises of his regiment of followers, it is then that we seem to ourselves completely to understand him, and it is then that we trace all his motions and treasure all his words with the deepest attention, and a perfect recognition of what he is. These are the reasons which invite the enquirer after the life of Chaucer to some consideration of ancient castles.

One of the most conspicuous features of the century immediately succeeding the conquest, was that every considerable baron was anxious to build for himself a residence, formed on ideas of military defence, and capable of resisting the attacks of a besieging army. Such fortresses were rare previously to the accession of William; and it was owing to this among various causes that, when he had struck his decisive blow at the battle of Hastings, the whole kingdom seemed immediately to surrender at discretion. A different policy however was almost instantaneously introduced. William the Conqueror was himself exceedingly partial to the art of fortification, and is described as “vexing and wearying the nation¹” with the erection of castles. He first parceled the country into a complete feudal monarchy, of which scheme of policy some essays only had previously existed among us²; and, as the feudal sys-

CHAP.
VIII.

Their mul-
tiplicity.

¹ Rous, apud Grose, Antiquities of England and Wales, Preface.

² Millar, Historical View of the English Government.

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VIII.

tem was considerably more military in its character than that which had preceded, this circumstance also naturally led to the multiplication of fortresses. Add to this the progress of civilisation; for men inevitably become more anxious about the means of defence, in proportion as they feel they have a larger property and more valuable possessions to defend. These, combined with the other considerations mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, led to the construction of that surprising number of castles which are related to have sprung up in the reign of Stephen.

Few things can lead more directly to our understanding the notions and modes of life of our ancestors, than a digested survey of that sort of building which they denominated a castle, and under the protection of which the great English barons, for more than a century after the conquest, held their usual residence.

Inferior
parts of
an an-
cient cas-
tle: the
wall, the

The word Castle, *castellum*, a diminutive from the Latin *castrum*, originally signified a *little camp*; and the dimensions and plan of

the ancient castles are in sufficient correspondence with this idea. The projector ordinarily chose for the site of his edifice a rising ground in the neighbourhood of a river. Having marked out the limits of his inclosure, he then surrounded it with a wall, ten or twelve feet high, flanked with towers, and with a narrow projection near the top on the inside, where the defenders might place themselves for the convenience of reconnoitring, or of using their weapons. Immediately before this wall on every side a ditch was hollowed, which was filled with water where it could be procured, and formed what we call the moat of the castle. A bridge was built over this ditch, or a draw-bridge set up on the inside, to be let down as occasion required.

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VIII.

ditch,
and the
bridge.

Another essential part of an ancient castle was the barbican, or watch-tower, always an outwork, and frequently placed beyond the ditch, at the external foot of the bridge.

The barbican.

In many castles there was a second wall, of considerably smaller circuit than the first, which was in like manner flanked with

Barracks,
a chapel,
a monastery, &c.

CHAP. towers. In this case it was not unusual for
VIII.
 various works ; barracks, a well, a chapel, an artificial mount, and even sometimes a monastery ; to be placed between the first and second walls. A second ditch with its draw-bridge was sometimes introduced ^v.

Principal
 tower, or
 keep.

The most important part however of that species of fortification, called an ancient castle, was the keep, or house of residence, in which the baron of former times held his state. The walls and towers before enumerated were a sort of extrinsic defence, from which, when the first and second walls were taken by the besiegers, the garrison retreated to the mansion, where they made their last stand.

The arti-
 ficial
 mount.

The keep, in the sort of fortifications erected in England previously to the conquest, seems to have been generally, if not always, built on the top of an artificial mount, whose summit was nearly of the same dimensions as the plane of the edifice it was destined to receive. From this circumstance

^v Grose, Preface, Castles.

it is supposed to have derived its Latin and French appellations, *dunjo*, *donjon*, the etymology of which is ascribed by the glossarists to an old Saxon and French word, *dun*, *dune*, a hill^w. CHAP.
VIII.

Very soon after the conquest however, great improvements were made in the art of fortification, which are principally ascribed to Gundulph bishop of Rochester, architect of the White Tower in the Tower of London, and of Rochester castle. So long as the artificial mount was retained, the keep was frequently placed in the exterior wall of the fortification; but, when this contrivance was laid aside as operose and unnecessary, the keep was for the most part removed into the centre of the building. In the construction of the artificial mount, particular attention was given to the rendering it steep, and its summit, except in one point, inaccessible. The portal therefore, in this plan of building, The portal. was placed on the ground-floor. The ex-

^w Grose, ditto : Du Cange, in voc.

CHAP.
VIII.

pedient introduced by Gundulph, with the view of superseding the use of the artificial mount, consisted in carrying up the portal to the second or third story, and leaving no place for entrance on the level of the ground; the form of the keep being commonly square, and the walls ten or twelve feet in thickness.

In this plan the entrance was by a spacious stone stair-case on the outside of the building. This stair-case frequently went in part round two sides of the keep. After having ascended a certain number of steps, there was a strong gate placed, which must be forced by an enemy before he could proceed further. He then came to what might be called the landing-place, where was an interval, with a draw-bridge to be let down on occasion. This draw-bridge being passed, he next encountered a second strong gate, which was usually the entrance of a tower of smaller height and dimensions, forming a vestibule to the principal tower, or keep. This portal, beside its gates, was defended by a herse, or portcullis, a machine precisely in the form of a harrow, composed of beams of wood crossing each

The draw-
bridge.

The vesti-
bule.

The port-
cullis.

other at right angles, with strong iron spikes projecting from their points of intersection. C H A P.
VIII.

This machine was fixed as a slider in grooves of stone hollowed for that purpose, and was worked up and down by a windlass securely contained within the walls of the keep. It was extremely heavy ; and, beside the spikes already mentioned, was furnished with other spikes in a perpendicular direction for the purpose of striking into the ground or floor beneath. The entrance of the keep itself was by a further portal, separating the principal tower from the appendant one, and provided in like manner with strong gates and a portcullis. A second
portal. The grand entrance is variously placed in the castles of this period, in some on the second, and in others on the third story.

The keep usually consisted of five floors : one below the surface, which was commonly the prison ; the ground-floor, appropriated for the reception of stores ; the second story, for the accommodation of the garrison ; the third, state-rooms for the habitation of the lord ; and the fourth, bed-chambers. The apart-
ments.

The accommodations of these times, though

CHAP.
VIII.

stately according to the ideas then prevailing, were such as would appear to a modern observer slender and inconvenient. Guildford castle, where king John in one instance celebrated his birth-day, had only one room on a floor. The usual number of principal rooms, in that floor which the possessor of the castle appropriated to his own convenience, did not exceed two. The garrison, who occupied the story immediately beneath, were crowded into a small proportionable compass, and slept on trusses of straw. The apartments were also very inadequately lighted. Those below the story upon which the state-rooms were placed, received the beams of the sun only through chinks or loops, extremely narrow, and cautiously constructed in such a manner as to afford no advantage to besiegers. In the state-rooms there were windows; but generally small in proportion to the size of the apartments, often but one in a room, broken through the thickness of the wall and protected by an internal arch, and placed at a considerable height from the level of the floor. The state-rooms however,

Loops and
windows,

though few in number, were not small ; those in Rochester castle, which may be taken as a medium, were fifty feet in length by twenty feet broad.

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VIII

The thickness of the walls, usually amounting to twelve feet, was such as to afford room for various constructions within the substance of them, such as wells, galleries of communication, &c. The wells constructed in the walls, some of them, included circular staircases, and others were left open, being destined for the purpose of raising, to the top of the building, in the times of siege, beams and other materials for the making or repairing of military machines. These machines were usually placed upon leads and a platform, contrived for the purpose, above the highest story of the keep. Wells for water were also sunk in some part of the building, but not in the substance of the walls, with conveniences for raising the water to any story of the edifice. Another, almost universal, contrivance, was that of a door, intended as a sally-port, raised several feet above the surface of the ground, but with no

Wells.

Sally-port.

CHAP.
VIII.

external stair leading to it, which was framed to favour unexpected attacks upon the besiegers, yet with every imaginable precaution to prevent the use of it being turned against the besieged. The chimneys were by loops in the walls, similar to those contrived for the admission of light into the lower apartments^x.

Subterra-
neous
passages.

Another artifice frequently introduced in the erection of ancient castles was the formation of a subterraneous passage, the commencement of which was in the keep itself, while the other extremity was at some distance without the walls, being intended, like the door last mentioned, for a sally-port, enabling the garrison to issue forth upon the besiegers by surprise. It was by such a passage that Edward III. surprised his mother and Roger Mortimer her paramour in Nottingham castle. The transaction is thus described by Stow. "There was a parliament holden at Nottingham, where Roger Mor-

^x King on Ancient Castles, apud Archæologia, Vol. IV. and VI.

timer was in such glorie and honour, that it CHAP.
VIII.
was without all comparison. No man durst
name him anie other than earle of March:
a greater route of men waited at his heeles,
than on the kinges person: he would suffer
the king to rise to him, and would walke with
the king equally, step by step, and cheeke by
cheeke, never preferring the king, but would
goe formost himselfe with his officers. Which
things troubled much the kings friends, to
wit, William Montacute, and other, who for
the safegarde of the king, sware themselves
to be true to his person, and drew unto them
Robert de Holland, who had of long time
beene keeper of the castle, unto whom all
secret corners of the same were knowne.
Then upon a certain night, the king lying
without the castle, both he and his friends
were brought by torch-light through a secret
way under ground, beginning far off from
the sayde castle, till they came even to the
queenes chamber, which they by chance found
open: they therefore being armed with naked
swords in their hands, went forwards, leaving
the king also armed without the doore of the

CHAP.
VIII.

chamber, least that his mother shoulde espie him: they which entred in, slew" immediately two of the attendants. "From thence, they went towarde the queene mother, whom they found with the earle of March readie to have gone to bedde: and having taken the sayde earle, they ledde him out into the hall, after whom the queene followed, crying, *Bel filz, bel filz, ayes pitie' de gentil Mortimer*, 'Good sonne, good sonne, take pittie upon gentle Mortimer:' for she suspected that her sonne was there, though shee saw him not y."

Palaces and
manor-
houses.

In the sort of castles which have just been described the baronage of England held their principal residence for a century after the conquest. The animosity which subsisted between the Saxon inhabitants and their Norman conquerors, and the disputes which continually arose about the succession to the crown, held the country for so long a time in a state of uncertainty and alarm. It was not

* Stow, Annals, A. D. 1329.

till the reign of Henry II. that England attained any considerable degree of tranquillity, C H A P.
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which, cooperating with the improvement of arts and the increase of knowledge, gradually led to a greater acquaintance with the conveniences of life. This proved the source of two kinds of revolution in the methods of building. In the first place, a nobleman of high rank and great property began to be desirous of possessing two sorts of habitations of a totally different nature; castles for strength and the support of his independence, and palaces for luxury. The second revolution is of a more curious sort, and derives its character from that principle of association in man, by which the mind almost always shows itself wedded to rooted prejudices and customs of an ancient date. It was thus that, after such castles as those brought to perfection by Gundulph ceased to be requisite for the sake of security, the man of birth, who had been brought up under their roofs from his infancy, yet retained a fond partiality for this style of building, and was led uselessly and discordantly to mix something

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VIII.

of the appearance of fortification, in the defenceless and more commodious edifices with which he now adorned his country.

Both these points are illustrated by what we know of the private life of John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster, the principal patron and encourager of Chaucer. One of the dignities vested in this nobleman was that of earl of Lincoln, in virtue of which he held Lincoln castle for one of his residences. He found however the situation of this castle too bleak and inhospitable for the winter season ; and, prompted by this motive, built himself a palace of residence for these inclement months in the lower part of the city. The same celebrated personage also, having come into possession of Kenelworth castle, the principal seat of the famous Simon Montford earl of Leicester, rebuilt it almost from its foundation, on a more enlarged and commodious plan than that which had characterised it in the time of his predecessors².

² King, ubi supra.

Considerable light may be thrown upon the manner of living of our ancestors, from a careful examination of the remains of their once proud places of residence. Their palaces and manor-houses always included one spacious apartment, where the lord was accustomed frequently to dine with his guests and the whole host of his retainers: such was originally Westminster Hall in the old palace of Westminster, and such was the part which is yet standing of the palace of our ancient English sovereigns at Eltham. Many tables were set out in these halls for the reception of a great multitude of guests; and, instead of the second and third tables maintained at present in the houses of our more opulent nobility in separate apartments, the whole body of those who were fed at the lord's expense sat down at once, in the times we are considering, in the greath all; the servants often dining in the same room, when their superiors had been already supplied and satisfied. Distinctions of a gross sort, but sufficiently adapted to the apprehension of the age, were introduced to distinguish the gra-

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Style of
living in
the mid-
dle ages.

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datations of rank in this miscellaneous assembly. The whole room was paved with free-stone, or sometimes had for its floor the bare earth, hardened by the continual tread of feet to the consistency of stone. At the upper end was a raised floor of planks, where the lord and his family with his most distinguished guests were seated, called the *dais*, from the French word *ais*, or the Latin *assis*, with the preposition prefixed, signifying, of planks. On some occasions, and in public royal entertainments, there were several of these *dais*, elevated one above the other^a. Another mode of distinction was by a large salt-cellar placed in the middle of a long table, while a finer sort of bread and the choicer wines were never circulated below the salt-cellar. Yet in these which may on some accounts be styled ruder times, and with distinctions to our conception so insulting, there was often an affection between the higher and lower

^a Tyrwhit, Edition of Canterbury Tales, note on ver. 372.

parties in the connection, which is now almost forgotten. The dignity of the lord was kind, considerate and fatherly, placing its pride in benefits, and not in oppression; and the submission of the inferior, which had also its pride, the pride of fidelity, the pride of liberal service and inviolate attachment, was a submission less conscious of terror, than of reverence and filial esteem.

At the lower end of the great hall was usually a screen-work, hiding from the persons sitting at the table the door of entrance and the passages to the offices. Over this screen was a gallery for the minstrelsy, and behind it, in front, the passages just mentioned, and on one side the door of entrance. The passages led variously to the buttery, the kitchen, the wine-cellar, and the bed-chambers. Annexed to the buttery, at a greater distance, were the bake-house and the brew-house; and in the kitchen, to which the passage was by a continual descent, with a hatchway in the middle, were vast fire-places with irons for a prodigious number of spits, stoves, great double ranges of dressers,

CHAP. large chopping-blocks, a massy table hollowed
VIII. into a sort of basons to serve as kneading
troughs, and every accommodation for pre-
paring food for an army of guests ^b.

These ancient palaces had also a number of other characteristics, which seize the imagination, and have lately been called up with great success by the inventors of fictitious narratives. Such are their trap-doors for descent; their long-protracted galleries; their immense suite of rooms opening one beyond the other; their chapels constituting a part of the mansion, by means of which the solitary explorer of the building unexpectedly descends among the monuments of the dead and the crumbling memorials of departed religion; and their arras hangings, with ill-contrived and rattling doors concealed behind them.

^b King, ubi supra.

CHAP. IX.

SCULPTURE AND PAINTING OF THE FOURTEENTH
CENTURY. — METALLIC ARTS. — EMBROIDERY. —
MUSIC.

THERE are few truths more striking in CHAP. IX.
the history of human affairs than that things
which may be hurtful and injurious in one
stage of society, had probably their period in
a different stage when they were eminently
advantageous and salutary. No speculation
can do less credit to the discernment of its
authors, than that which, examining insti-
tutions and practices in the abstract, decides
indiscriminately that this is good and univer-
sally desirable, while that is fitted only to
be the plague of mankind. Every thing has
its place ; and it would be difficult to find any
cause influencing the mind of man in society,
however now perhaps antiquated, insipid or

CHAP. IX. poisonous, which was not at one period genial and nourishing, restraining the ferocious and savage passions, or forwarding and maturing the fairest offspring of intellect. Thus, perhaps the secularised and degenerate religion established by Constantine and his successors contributed to bring on the darkness and ignorance of the middle ages: yet that very religion acting upon the barbarous usurpers of the Roman empire tended to keep alive some of the arts of a more cultivated period, and to prevent the darkness from becoming universal and complete.

What has been called the worship of images, or, more accurately speaking, the attempt to render more defined and habitual the intellectual conceptions of the multitude by the assistance of a gross and sensible representation, was the invention of the dark ages of the church. This was natural and just: without some contrivance to act powerfully upon the senses, there could not perhaps in such ages be any religion. This also tended, not merely to keep alive, but to raise

into an object of general attention and request, CHAP. IX.
the practice of some sort of sculpture and
some sort of painting.

Our Saxon ancestors, when they issued from the forests of Scandinavia, had their images. Thor, Woden, and the other Gods of their mythology, were each personated by their solid and substantial representatives. Sometimes perhaps these vicarious divinities were as rudely fashioned as the God Terminus among the Romans: at others they were endowed by their creators with something of the human form^a. When the Saxons were converted to the catholic faith this idolatry was abolished; but it was not long before the Runic idols were succeeded by images and representations of a different nature. Crucifixes, and statues of the virgin Mary and the saints, were essential instruments of religious worship in these ages of the church.

State of
sculpture
and paint-
ing under
the Sax-
ons.

^a In Verstegan [Restitution of Decayed Intelligence] there is a description of those deities with their attributes: the prints with which it is accompanied must however be regarded as purely imaginary.

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Nor was the art of painting neglected. Biscop abbot of Weremouth in particular, who has already been mentioned as one of the great improvers of architecture in the seventh century, made five journeys to Rome for the purpose of procuring books, and ornaments for the religious edifices he founded. Bede informs us that he adorned his church of St. Peter at Weremouth with pictures of the virgin mother of God, of the twelve apostles, of the events of the gospel history, and of the visions of the Apocalypse, with which the walls appear to have been covered. This was done, as Bede expresses it, that all the persons who entered the building, though ignorant of letters, might be impressed with the amiable aspect of Christ and his saints, and instructed in the contents of the sacred volume. The church of the monastery of St. Paul, which Biscop built at Gyrwi or Yarrow, was also decorated in a similar manner^b.

As the veneration for images and demand

^b Betle, Vitæ Abbatum in Wiramutha & Gyrwin, Lib. I.

for the pictures of sacred subjects increased, CHAP. IX.
 the Saxons, the clergy in particular, studied
 the art of manufacturing these commodities
 for themselves. The celebrated St. Dunstan,
 among his other accomplishments, was ap-
 plauded for his skill in the art of painting^c.
 This was in the tenth century. At the same
 period we read of portraits, which were so
 common as for the same person to be painted
 several times^d; and of historical compositions
 representing the actions of persons of merit.
 Edelfleda, a Saxon and duchess dowager of
 Northumberland, had a curtain painted with
 the heroic achievements of her deceased lord,
 to perpetuate the memory of his integrity and
 virtues^e.

The monks in the different convents were
 necessarily persons of great leisure, and it is
 not wonderful that they applied themselves

of the arts
 of work-
 ing in
 gold and
 silver.

^c Osbern, De Vita S. Dunstani, Lib. I, apud Anglia Sacra, Vol. II.

^d Malmesbury, De Antiq. Glaston. Eccles. art. Styward, apud XV Scriptores à Gale.

^e Hist. Elyensis, Lib. II, c. 7, apud XV Scriptores.

CHAP. IX with perseverance and assiduity to the more delicate and refined departments of the mechanic arts. Among the legacies of Charlemagne, who died in the year 814, are mentioned three tables of silver, of extraordinary magnitude and weight. One of them was square, and enchased with a representation of the city of Constantinople; a second was round, and exhibited in the same manner the effigies of the city of Rome; and the third, which was larger and more beautiful than the rest, contained within three circles a representation of the whole world, in workmanship exquisitely minute and fine^f. Whether these tables were constructed by the command of the emperor, or were the remains of a greater antiquity, we are not told; but they may at least be supposed to have excited an emulation of skill in the minds of the spectators. Accordingly we meet with various instances of a similar ingenuity in the English nation. St. Dunstan is no less celebrated by his bio-

^f Testamentum Car. Mag. apud Eginhartum, Vita Car. Mag. cap. 33.

grapher for dexterity in engraving, and manu-
facturing various saintly trinkets, than for his
proficiency in the art of painting^e; and the
excellence of the English artists in these par-
ticulars was so notorious, that the mode of
decorating the curious caskets, adorned with
gold, silver and precious stones, in which
the relics of the saints were kept, seems in
these times to have been styled by way of
distinction *opus Anglicum*^h.

The same commendation was acquired by
the natives of England in the practice of
embroideryⁱ. A very curious monument of
the state of this art at the time of the Norman
conquest is the celebrated tapestry of Bayeux,
which still exists, and is publicly exhibited
at stated periods in the cathedral of that city.
It is a web of linen, nearly two feet in
breadth, and two hundred and forty-two in
length, embroidered with the history of that

of embroi-
dery.

^e Osbern, ubi supra.

^h Leo Marsicanus, apud Muratori, *Antiquitates Medii
Ævi*, Diss. LVIII.

ⁱ Gul. Pictaviensis, sub fine, apud Scriptores Norman.
à Duchesne.

CHAP. IX. memorable expedition, from the embassy of Harold to the Norman court in 1065 till his death in the following year. The scenes of this busy period are successively exhibited, and consist of many hundred figures of men, horses, beasts, birds, trees, houses, castles and churches, with inscriptions over them, explanatory of their meaning and history ^k.

^k Montfaucon, Tom. I. & II. Ducarel, Anglo-Norman Antiquities, App. No. 1. In each of these authors is to be found a series of engravings, representing the entire contents of this tapestry.

It is interesting to remark the resemblance of nations, in different ages and portions of the globe, but in the same stage of civilisation. In a late book upon Africa, we are told that the Moors of the Zahara have goldsmiths, who construct, in gold, silver and steel, rings, ear-rings, chains and bracelets, and make toys in fillagree work and arabesque, that is, with grains of gold imperceptibly small, which, being placed contiguous to each other, form the outlines of an infinite variety of designs. They also incrust and enamel the hilts of their sabres, and adorn the sheaths with plates of gold wrought with exquisite delicacy and art. They have the secret of preparing and working the skins of lambs, till they are as fine as paper, which are then stained with a variety of colours, and formed into sandals, slippers, boots, and harness and housings for their horses.

Fragmens d'un Voyage en Afrique, par Golberry, chap. vii.

This work is understood to have been per-
formed under the direction of Matilda consort
to William I, and was not improbably exe-
cuted by the hands of English women, whose
superiority in performances of this kind was
then universally acknowledged.

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The revolution produced in this country
by the Norman conquest was no less favour-
able to the progress of the arts of sculpture
and painting, than to that of architecture.
As the Normans built more costly and mag-
nificent structures, it was to be expected that
they should be sumptuous and diligent in
adorning them. The painted cielings exe-
cuted by the orders of Lanfranc archbishop
of Canterbury, and Aldred archbishop of
York, contemporaries of William the Con-
queror, in certain cathedrals and churches,
are mentioned in terms of warm approbation
by the contemporary historians¹. Portraits,

Art of
painting
under the
Normans.

¹ Gervasius Dorob. de Combustione & Rep. Dorob. Eccl.
apud Decem Scriptores. Stubbs, Actus Pontif. Ebor. ditto.
Neither Gervas nor Stubbs however expressly mentions that
these painted cielings were adorned with figures.

CHAP. IX. supposed to be taken from the life, of William the Conqueror, his queen Matilda, and his two sons Robert and William, the latter being yet a stripling, were painted upon the outside of the walls of the chapel of St. Stephen's Abbey at Caen, and were destroyed on occasion of some alterations made in that building in the year 1700^m. An extraordinary story is told by William of Malmesburyⁿ, which, if worthy of credit, would imply that portrait-painting had at this time, at least in one essential point, arrived at considerable perfection. Anselm archbishop of Canterbury performed a journey to Rome in the year 1097. Urban II. was at that time pope, and Guibert antipope. The counsellors of Guibert were impressed with an opinion that Anselm was travelling with an immense sum of money, drawn from the fertile province of England, and destined to support Urban in his pretensions. Under this persuasion they

^m Montfaucon, Tom. I, Philippe I. Ducarel, p. 61.

ⁿ De Gestis Pontificum, Lib. I.

determined to waylay and plunder him. CHAP. IX.
The pious archbishop however received information of their plot, and avoided the ambuscade. Guibert, incensed at his escape, projected to intercept him in his return, and for this purpose dispatched a painter to Rome to make his picture, that, whatever disguise he might assume, it might be impossible for him again to elude the pontifical bravoës. The usual interposition of providence however attended the holy man; intelligence was given him of what had passed, and he took his journey by a different route.

During the preaching of the crusade under the same pope, one of the artifices employed to rouse and exasperate the godly to engage in the expedition, was the transmitting certain pictures into the different regions of Christendom, and exposing them to the view of the people. One of these represented Christ, with his usual symbols and tokens, tied to a stake, and scourged by an Arabian, supposed to be Mahomet, or, as he was then named in the West, Mahound. Another displayed a Saracen champion, mounted on his war-horse,

CHAP. IX. and trampling upon the holy sepulchre, his horse appearing at the same time in the act of staling upon this mysterious receptacle of a departed God °.

Art of illuminating.

Another invention brought to considerable excellence at this period was that of illuminating manuscripts, or surrounding the title-page, and capital letters at the commencement of certain paragraphs, with paintings. The colours employed in these illuminations are of singular brilliancy and lustre : they are adorned with a profusion of gilding ; and the workmanship is frequently executed with surprising minuteness and perseverance. It was natural that the solitary and sedentary monk in his cloister, one of whose employments often was the transcribing of books, should strain his eyes, and exhaust his hours, in this delicate and microscopical industry. A collection has been made, from these sources, of the miniature portraits of all

° Abulfeda & Bohaoddin, apud Henry, Book III, chap. v, §. 2.

the kings and several of the queens of Eng- CHAP. IX.
land, from Edward the Confessor to Henry
VII, together with many eminent persons of
both sexes^p. It is obvious however that little
stress is to be laid upon such portraits, re-
specting which we may reasonably believe
that the persons they represent never sat to
the delineator.

In metallic works, tapestry and embroidery,
the progress was somewhat similar to that
which was made in the art of painting. Mat-
thew Paris, who composed the Lives of the
Abbots of St. Albans, has furnished us with
several important anecdotes on this subject.
Richard, abbot of St. Albans in the reign of
William Rufus, gave to his convent, toge-
ther with various other ornaments, a tapestry
in which was figured the martyrdom of their
patron-saint^q. Robert, his successor in the
reign of Henry II, presented to pope Adrian
on his accession to the papal chair three mitres

Arts of
working
in metals,
tapestry
and em-
broidery.

^p Strutt, Regal and Ecclesiastical Antiquities.

^q *Vite Abbatum*, Cap. XV.

CHAP. IX. and a pair of sandals of admirable workmanship, with which the pope was so much pleased that, refusing the other oblations which this dignitary offered him, he yet condescended to accept of these. Adrian, understanding the superiority of the English in metallic arts, further commissioned Robert to procure him two candlesticks, delicately manufactured of silver and gold, that should be set before the high altar of St. Peters at Rome; which commission the abbot, to the great satisfaction of the pope, speedily after performed^r. Simon the next abbot, a learned man and a devoted friend to Thomas of Becket, was peculiarly munificent in gifts to his monastery. He caused a most sumptuous shrine to be made for receiving the relics of St. Alban, which was several years in completing. In the front of this shrine was represented in *alto rilievo* the decollation of the saint, and on the other sides the events of his life, which formed as it were the earnest and

^r Vitæ Abbatum, Cap. xviii.

preparation of his martyrdom. The lid pre-
sented to the spectator two oblique surfaces : CHAP. IX.
on that to the east was carved the crucifixion,
with the Virgin and St. John attending, the
whole being set round with a frame of pre-
cious stones : and on the surface to the west
appeared the Virgin with the infant Christ on
her knees, seated upon a throne, and profusely
adorned with jewels. Each corner of the
shrine was surmounted with a turret, with
windows beautifully carved, and roofs of
chrysal. The same abbot gave to his mo-
nastery a large chalice of gold, wrought with
flowers and foliage of the most exquisite
workmanship ; and a vessel for containing
the eucharist, of the finest gold, and adorned
with gems of inestimable value, in which
nevertheless the workmanship excelled the
materials : this vessel was suspended over the
high altar^s.

We shall be little surprised at finding some
of these arts carried to a higher degree of

^s Vitæ Abbatum, Cap. xix.

CHAP. IX. perfection, and many of their productions more elaborately executed, than perhaps from so remote a period of society we might have been inclined to suspect, if we recollect the pride, the wealth and ostentation of the clergy of these times, and the innumerable multitude of persons, secular and regular, of which their body consisted. The mistaken piety of a superstitious age is computed to have surrendered into their hands one third of the rent-roll of England^t; their leisure was great, their science infinitely superior to that of their contemporaries, and their ambition immeasurable. They planted the island with the most beautiful and magnificent religious structures; and, having done so, it was natural that they should adorn them with equal prodigality and research. When we consider these men under every point of view; how

^t Hume, Chap. xviii. Hume refers for this fact to a speech of the speaker of the house of commons, 6 H. IV, inserted in Walsingham. There is however no such assertion in the speech given by that historian. The calculation itself is probably not far from the truth.

wise, how wealthy and how bountiful ; that CHAP. IX.
 they possessed themselves of every engine for
 affecting the heart of man, and that the heart
 of man was laid naked and defenceless be-
 neath their hand ; the wonder is rather, that
 their operations were not more astonishing,
 than that they did so much.

The reign of Henry III. was still more
 favourable to the imitative arts than that of
 any of his predecessors ; and this monarch,
 however inglorious be the figure he makes
 amidst the turbulent spirits of the thirteenth
 century, appears from his records to have
 cherished with some anxiety the species of
 taste which then existed. Upward of twenty
 royal warrants have been exhibited, con-
 taining various directions for adorning with
 historical paintings his palaces of Winches-
 ter, Woodstock, Windsor, Westminster and
 others^u. Among these we may remark one
 dated in the year 1233, directing the wainscot
 of the king's chamber in Winchester castle to

State of the
 fine arts
 in the
 reign of
 Henry
 III.

^u Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting, Chap. I.

CHAP. IX. be painted with the same histories and pictures with which it had been painted before; whence we may infer that painting the chambers of profane buildings was in use in England so long before this period, as for the paintings to be already tarnished, and in want of being renewed. This warrant, as well as several of the rest, is directed to the sheriff of the county, and is understood to imply that he was to impress painters, in the same manner as it was the custom of these times to impress masons and other artificers; a circumstance which has no great tendency to excite in us an idea of the improved and refined state of the art. It has also been remarked that another of these warrants, dated in the year 1239, is so expressed as to imply that the use of oil-colours was then known, an improvement vulgarly supposed to have been introduced two centuries later*. The subjects of these pictures are chiefly from sacred writ; together with some from the le-

* Walpole, Anecdotes of Painting, Chap. I.

gends of the saints, as St. Christopher bearing Christ, and St. Edward giving a ring from his finger to a stranger-pilgrim; and some from the history of the crusades, which last particular is conjectured to have occasioned one of the apartments in the old palace at Westminster to be called the Jerusalem chamber *.

The art of sculpture does not seem to have obtained less encouragement and countenance in this reign than that of painting. Matthew Paris particularly celebrates Walter of Colchester, sacrist of the abbey of St. Albans, whom he pronounces an incomparable artist, and declares that he knew of no one equal to him that had lived before, nor did he believe that an equal would ever come after him. His most finished performances were to be found in the abbey of St. Albans, of which Matthew Paris was a member *.

* Walpole, ubi supra. Among the merits of Henry III. relative to the arts, it is proper to mention that he completely rebuilt Westminster Abbey, which however, together with the palace, was burnt to the ground in the year 1299.

* Vitæ Abbatum, Cap. xxii.

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Epoch of
Cimabuë
and Giot-
to.

It was from the latter part of the reign of Henry III, that what has usually been called the revival of the arts in Italy dates its commencement. Cimabuë was born in the year 1240, and Giotto in the year 1276. All that is prior, in painting or sculpture, to the labours of the first of these artists, may be considered as representative of monsters rather than men, and has no countervailing merits to redeem its obnoxious deformities. It was useful and commendable in its day; it has effectually swayed the mind and edified the soul as the more meritorious productions of ancient or modern refinement are capable of doing; it awakened the imagination and purified the intellect of its contemporaries: but it has nothing, brilliancy of colour perhaps excepted, which, even with every allowance for the rudeness of the times, a cultivated taste can persuade itself to admire. Such at least is the decision of artists

* Vasari, Vite de' Pittori, Parte I.

* Roscoe, Chap. IX.

and connoisseurs ; the less disdainful temper CHAP. IX.
of a sound philosophy would perhaps be less
peremptory and indiscriminate in its judg-
ment.

Nothing however is more unquestionable than the improvements made in the imitative arts in Italy, in the latter part of the thirteenth and commencement of the fourteenth century ; improvements which went on with an almost uninterrupted progress till they terminated in the glorious and sublime productions of Michel Agnolo and Raffaële. The amendment which took place under Giotto is perhaps more conspicuous than in the case of any other individual. The sharp hands and feet, the unbending drapery, the unforeshortened figures, the shrivelled and unmuscular limbs, the vacant countenance, and the total want of shadow, all of them faults to a considerable degree imputable to his predecessors, are each remedied or diminished by him. His figures have some degree of freedom and life ; their members are often manly and strong ; and the features are to a surpris-

CHAP. IX.

ing degree enlivened with expression and passion.

St. Stephen's
Chapel.

One of the most curious monuments of the state of the fine arts in England in the time of Chaucer, was discovered in the year 1800, when certain alterations were made in the apartment occupied by the lower house of parliament, in consequence of the addition of one hundred members from Ireland, by means of the union with that country. This apartment was originally built by king Stephen, as a chapel for the accommodation of himself and his successors, within the royal palace of Westminster; and was dedicated by him to his patron saint, Stephen the proto-martyr^a. It was rebuilt, or rather finished with great magnificence, by Edward III; who rendered it collegiate, and established a foundation in it for one dean and twelve canons, beside vicars, choristers and servitors, by a patent, dated 6 August 1348^b. This was

^a Stow, Survey of London: Citie of Westminster.

^b Rymer, Fœdera, Tom. V.

one of the establishments abolished at the re-
formation, and the chapel given as a place of
assembly to the lower house of parliament
by Edward VI. In 1800 the wainscot with
which the whole apartment was lined, was
taken down, and behind it were discovered
on all sides the most magnificent paintings,
and the richest ornaments and gilding, which
England in the reign of Edward III. was able
to produce. Though executed so long be-
fore, they appeared in all their freshness, the
gilding brilliant, and the colours untarnished.
These paintings appear to have been modelled
in a certain degree upon the improvements
of Giotto, but with that inferiority which is
usually found in proportion as the exertions
of any art depart from the centre (which at
that time, under the head of painting, was
Italy) where that art is most successfully cul-
tivated.

Extraordinary efforts appear to have been
made, to render the paintings in fresco on
the walls of St. Stephen's Chapel, the most
splendid and complete that circumstances,
and the state of the art of painting at that

CHAP. IX. time, would allow. A writ appears to have been directed to a certain knight, authorising and empowering him to procure competent artists for this great work: and, if artists who should be judged competent could not be found in England, they were to be invited from the continent; and, according to the mode of the times, to be imprisoned, if refractory, till they should show themselves disposed to apply the whole treasures of their skill to complete this monument of the monarch's piety. The two principal painters finally employed are understood to have been by name, John of , and Thomas of ; and the work, which was begun in 1347, was not completed till 1379, the second year of Richard II.

Among the pictures which had sustained the least injury from the hands of the workmen employed, either on former occasions or in these last repairs, two of the most observable were, a Nativity, with the adoration of the shepherds, on one side of the high altar; and a representation of the catastrophe of the family of Job, as described in the first

chapter of the history of that patriarch: CHAP. IX.

“While his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house, a great wind came from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they died.” The length of these pictures was about three feet each, and the figures about sixteen inches in height; so that there must have been a great number of similar pieces painted on the different walls of the chapel. But, beside these sacred histories, there was an infinite number of figures, above, below, and on every side, of saints, angels, princes and heroes, with appropriate inscriptions, and blazonry of arms. There was also, on the side of the high altar opposite to the Nativity, but not in the corresponding place (that was blank, the painting which had filled it being effaced), a delineation of two royal personages, probably Edward III. and his queen Philippa, as large, or nearly as large, as life. With these more serious subjects were mixed, according to the manners of the times, several ludicrous representations

CHAP. IX. in a smaller size ; among them a cat hanging, attended by other cats, apparently her executioners : this had probably some satirical meaning which, at this distance of time, we are unable to decipher.

In these pictures, as in the paintings of Giotto, though they exhibited great improvements upon the delineations of former artists, there appeared a continual violation, and almost total ignorance, of the principles of anatomy, proportion and perspective, with very little knowledge of light and shadow, and what is called the harmony of colour. The breach of perspective was so gross in the picture of the Nativity, as for Joseph, who was in the back-ground, to be the largest figure, while several in front were painted in a diminutive size. It is to be remarked that these pictures were unquestionably finished in oil^e.

^e Most of these particulars are given on the authority of Mr. Flaxman, sculptor and royal academician, to whose liberal information I acknowledge myself greatly indebted. Some exquisite imitations of parts of the paintings in St.

One of the best specimens of the art of CHAP. IX. painting in England in the fourteenth century, is said to be a whole length of Richard II, which is placed in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey. It is however understood to have been repainted by a modern artist, so that our judgment of the state of the art is rather perhaps to be formed from the engraving which has been taken of it, than from the picture as it now appears ^d.

Chaucer therefore had a right to consider himself as fallen upon no barbarous or inglo-

Period of
Chaucer.

Stephen's Chapel, by Mr. R. Smirke, junior, are hung up in the library of the Antiquarian Society. Mr. Smith of Newman Street is preparing a full delineation and history of these antiquities, and is understood to have in his possession a complete series of original documents, as to the artists employed, the expences incurred, and other particulars respecting this memorable work. The names of the principal artists, which are in my possession, are left blank in page 280, that I might not hazard the anticipating in any degree the information to be contained in Mr. Smith's work. A few documents on the subject of this undertaking are to be found in Rymer, of the dates of 18 March 1350, 4 June 1363, and 4 August 1377, respectively.

^d Walpole, Chap. II. For a few hints toward a catalogue of ancient portraits in England, see Appendix, No. II.

CHAP. IX. rious age. Among his immediate predecessors in the period of their existence were Giotto and Dante; and their successors, his coequals, perhaps his friends, were fast advancing in the career which they had opened. The achievements of the human mind never appear so stupendous as when they exhibit themselves in their newest gloss. After the lapse of ages we may possibly find that we have been continually improving, and that in most, though not in all, the arts and exercises of our nature, we have gained something in scope and something in address. But our ancestors were so considerable, and our own additions have been so miscellaneous or minute, as to afford to an impartial and dispassionate observer small cause for any high degree of elation. Chaucer had only to look back for a single century to find the whole of Europe in a state comparatively barbarous. The sun of science had risen, and the dews which welcome its beams were not yet dissipated: he smelled the freshness of the morning, and his heart dilated at the sight of its soft and unsullied hues.

The history of music in this country has CHAP. IX.
 been in some degree anticipated in what has
 been already said of the minstrels. The
 island of Great Britain resounded with mu-
 sical compositions from the commencement
 to the close of the Saxon dynasty. No na-
 tion is so barbarous as not to amuse its hours
 of festival and recreation with the "concord
 of sweet sounds." What has been handed
 down to us respecting the ancient scalds and
 Runic songs, inspires us with more honour
 and mysterious veneration, than we feel for
 the early professors of music of almost any
 other age or country. The Death-song of
 Lodbrog is represented as having been sung
 by him, with a firm and threatening voice,
 amidst the agonies of a tormenting death;
 and whether we regard this statement as se-
 vere history, or as heightened by the colour-
 ing of imagination, it equally proves how
 high an opinion was entertained of, and how
 powerful effects were experienced from, the

State of
 profane
 music un-
 der the
 Saxons.

* Olaus Wormius, Danica Literatura, Appendix.

CHAP. IX. performance of music and song. Egil Skallagrim had killed the son and several of the friends of the king of Norway ; he was sent a prisoner and a victim to the irritated monarch ; thus circumstanced, he sung before his enemy and his judge a song adapted to the occasion, which afterward received the name of Egil's Ransom, and the effect of his song was such, that the king immediately loosened his chains, and dismissed him free and unhurt^f. The power of music is thus hyperbolically commemorated in one of the songs of the Runic bards^g. " I know a song, by which I soften and inchant the arms of my enemies ; and render their weapons of none effect. I know a song which I need only to sing when men have loaded me with bonds ; for the moment I sing it, my chains fall in pieces, and I walk forth at liberty. I know a song, useful to all mankind ; for as soon as hatred inflames the sons of men, the moment I sing it they are appeased. I know

^f Olaus Wormius, ubi supra.

^g Percy, Northern Antiquities, Vol. II.

a song of such virtue, that were I caught in CHAP: IX.
 a storm, I can hush the winds, and render the
 air perfectly calm."

Nor was music more cultivated by the
 scalds and the minstrels, than it was by the
 heads of the church their contemporaries.
 We have seen the ecclesiastics of these ages
 ready on several occasions to take a lesson
 from the professors of arts which they vilified,
 and they found their advantage in it. When
 Austin, the apostle of the Saxon dynasty,
 and the companions of his mission, had their
 first audience of Ethelbert king of Kent, they
 approached him in procession, singing litanies;
 and afterward, as they entered the city of
 Canterbury, they sung a litany, and at the
 end of it an Allelujah^h. They trusted pro-
 bably as much to the charms of the Roman
 Chant, as settled by pope Gregory the Great,
 as to the arguments of the apostles and evan-
 gelists, for the conversion of their idolatrous
 hearers. Church-music was one of the studies
 most assiduously pursued in the colleges of

of sacred
 music.

^h Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica, Lib. I, cap. 25.

CHAP. IX.

Burns to
 Chaucer

this period ; professors of this art were distributed throughout England ; those who were desirous of attaining the highest degree of excellence in it travelled to Rome for that purpose ; and no accomplishment led with greater certainty to the most eminent stations in the church. The Gospels, the Epistles, and almost every part of the service, were in these times set to music, and performed by rules of art¹. Dancing, as well as music, appears also to have constituted a part of the service of the church¹. The word choir [*χορος*] as a denomination for that compartment of the sacred edifice adjoining to the altar, seems to have owed its origin to this circumstance. Every thing in this era of the church was adapted to the pleasure of the eye and the ear ; and men were won over to the cause of devotion by means best adapted to their rude habits and untrained understandings.

Musical discoveries in
 the eleventh century.

The eleventh century appears to have been the period at which the most important and

¹ Burney, History of Music, Vol. II, chap. i.

remarkable changes were introduced into the science of music. It was during this century that counterpoint, or the method of singing in parts, was introduced ; that Guido Aretino invented his scale of music ; and Franco of Cologne the time-table, or method of notation by which the length to be given to each musical sound was determined ^k. Previously to this last invention, time had no separate or independent existence relative to musical sounds, but was regulated by the long or short quantity of the syllables of the words to which each tune or piece of music was appropriated. These three discoveries may be regarded as the parent events to which the character and refinements of modern music are indebted for their origin. CHAP. IX.

Much may be alleged, and not without justice, in commendation of these refinements ; but they ought not to be so praised as to make us forget the real and indestructible merits of the ancient music. It has already

Effect of
these dis-
coveries.

^k Burney, History of Music, Vol. II, chap. ii, iii.

CHAP. IX. appeared that the music of the dark ages may without disadvantage compare with the music of any age or country as to its power over the passions. Nor has any lapse of time, or progress of improvement, been able to supersede the favour with which music of this ancient and simple character is regarded by the mass of almost every nation in Europe.

The reason of these facts is obvious. In the ancient music the sounds produced by the singer or the instrument were subordinate to the words ; and every man, not infatuated with the passion for music, will admit that, however rapturous or impressive may be the accord of sounds, yet the language of music, taken separately from words, is loose, obscure and enigmatical, susceptible of various interpretations, and guiding us with no sufficient decision to any. When we hear a tune unaccompanied with words (unless that tune by past association is enabled to raise up in our minds the image or general purpose of certain words), or when we hear a tune in which the luxuriance and multiplicity of musical sounds obscures and tramples with disdain upon the

majestic simplicity of words, our attention will almost universally be fixed less upon the passion which ought to be communicated, than upon the skill of the artist; we shall admire much, and feel comparatively little. In a tune in which the number and time of the musical sounds are regulated by the syllabic measure of the verse, there will be an awful or a fascinating simplicity, which is capable of powerfully moving the heart. Refined and scientific music can delight no man, but from affectation, unless it be aided by previous habits or education. The taste for it is consequently an artificial taste; and when most perseveringly and successfully cultivated, yet its power over the mind will never rise to so great a degree of strength, as the pleasures of natural taste.

Previously to the eleventh century the only species of music which existed in Europe was that which has been technically denominated Plain Song; in other words, however great was the number of voices which joined in executing any piece of music, they all sung precisely the same note at the same instant of

CHAP. IX. time. The first innovation upon this simplicity, already referred to, was the practice of singing in parts ; that is, a second or third series of notes was performed during the execution of the principal part, which was designed to accompany and embellish the body or main thread of the tune. This had a necessary tendency to obscure the words, and perhaps to sacrifice in some degree the passion of the performance, to the design of affording a more rich and various pleasure to the hearer. The second innovation arose out of the invention of a method of notation for marking the time to be assigned to musical sounds. This notation, by rendering in its consequences the length of the notes entirely independent of the words and syllables of the song, produced a sort of divorce between poetry and music ; music being by this contrivance enabled at pleasure either to drown the words in the luxuriances of her fantastic variations, or to rest upon her private and intrinsic claims to favour, and reject the aid of words altogether. Guido Aretino's invention of his musical scale was neutral as to these re-

volutions; except that by rendering the method of committing music to writing more full and exact, he facilitated the study of the art, and rendered it more easily susceptible either of fancied or real improvements. CHAP. IX.

But, though the method of singing in parts is to be traced back as far as the eleventh century, it made little progress for several centuries after¹. The songs of the minstrels still retained for the most part their ancient rudeness and simplicity; and, when we consider the length of some of the performances they chanted (poems even of twenty thousand lines, written at this time, bear internal evidence of being intended for music), it will not be supposed that the recital of them was accompanied with many of the graces of a modern tune. Nor did the innovations we have spoken of find in many instances a more cordial reception in the church, than from the companies of profaner practitioners. The ecclesiastics have always been, still more than

Slowness
with
which
they were
received.

¹ Burney, Vol. II, chap. iv.

CHAP. IX. any other incorporated body of men, the enemies of change ; and the monastic writers of this period uniformly express themselves with horror against these daring refinements, which they regard as a sort of sacrilege, substituting for the solemnity of pious adoration, an unholy emulation in the tricks of the voice, or in the difficulties and escapes of instrumental execution^m.

Instruments
of music.

Venerable Bede, who died in the year 735, though minute in his account of the psalmody of his times, is entirely silent on the subject of instrumental musicⁿ; a clear proof that no such was then allowed in the church. The first organ which was seen in France was sent from Constantinople as a present to king

^m Johannes Sarisburiensis, Policraticus, Lib. I, cap. 6.

ⁿ This remark applies to his treatise *De Musica Theoretica*. A second treatise follows in the collection of his works, entitled *De Musica Quadrata, seu Mensurata*, in which the organ, viol, atola, and other instruments are named. But this treatise speaks also of singing in parts, or descant ; of measured song, and other subsequent improvements ; and could not have been written till some centuries after the death of Bede.

Pepin, soon after the death of Bede ^o. This CHAP. IX.
 instrument, so peculiarly adapted to sacred music, gradually gained admission in religious worship. St. Dunstan in the tenth century appears to have been the constructor of one of the first organs which were admitted into the English church ^p. The minstrels of the early ages resembled in their performances the simplicity of the church, and for a long time were contented with the single accompaniment of the harp. The number of instruments however gradually increased, and before the middle of the fourteenth century we have an account of a concert in France, in which no fewer than thirty musical instruments of different names were introduced ^q.

Chaucer appears to have been himself a great lover of music. He never omits an occasion of celebrating its power; and the passages of his works which relate to this sub-

Chaucer a
lover of
music.

^o Burney, Vol. II, chap. i, ii.

^p Malmesbury, De Pontificibus Anglorum Liber V, seu Vita Aldhelmi Pars iv, apud Anglia Sacra, Tom. II.

^q Burney, Vol. II, chap. iv.

CHAP. IX.ject are peculiarly lively and animated. The concert of birds at the end of the Court of Love, and the Contention of the Cuckow and Nightingale, particularly deserve to be referred to as examples of this; and the manner in which he describes the “noise and sweetness” that awoke him from his sleep, in the Book of the Duchess^r, may be cited as a proof that the practice of singing in parts was by this time sufficiently common.

Me thoughten thus, that it was Maye,
 And in the dawning there I lay
 (Me^s met thus) in my bed al naked,
 And lokéd forthe,——for I was waked
 With smalé foulés a gret hepe,
 That had^t afraied me out of slepe;——
 And everiche songé in his wise
 The moste swete and solempne servise
 By note, that ever man I trowe
 Had herde, for some of hem songe lowe,
 Some highe, and al of one accorde.

Conclusion.

We have now taken a survey of many of

^r vers. 297. ^s dreamed. ^t *fortè*, abraied; awaked.

the circumstances, scenes and institutions of CHAP. IX.
this period, which were particularly fitted to
impress and modify the youthful mind of
Chaucer. Many others will spontaneously
present themselves in the course of the nar-
rative, and unite with these already described,
to furnish a picture of the manners, customs,
deficiencies and improvements of the English
nation in the fourteenth century.

CHAP. X.

CHAUCER AT CAMBRIDGE.—STATE OF THE UNIVERSITIES. — MONASTIC AND MENDICANT ORDERS. — THE SCHOOLMEN. — NATURAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

CHAP. X. AFTER having passed through a certain course of education in London, Chaucer was removed to the university of Cambridge. He speaks of himself at the age of eighteen by the epithet of “ Philogenet, of Cambridge, clerk ^a.” He therefore probably entered himself of the university at the age of fifteen or sixteen, a period still frequently chosen for

^a Court of Love, vers. 912, Urry's Edit. Throughout these volumes this edition will always be referred to, except for the Canterbury Tales; not from any feeling of preference, but from convenience, it being in that edition only that the lines are numbered.

that purpose. Cambridge however, at the CHAP. X.
time that Chaucer studied there, presented a
very different scene from that which it now
exhibits.

In the eleventh, and the early part of the
twelfth century, all the learning which existed
in the West was to be found among the ec-
clesiastics. Wace, and probably Benoit, the
poets of Henry II, were churchmen; our early
historians were all monks; Henry I, the eldest
of our princes in whose person learning was
elevated to the throne, had by his father been
destined to the church. Power, artifice, and
the subtler webs of policy, were in those times
the exclusive attributes of the saints and im-
mediate servants of God, while the rest of the
world were sunk in ignorance and disorder,
with no strength but that of limbs and mus-
cles, and no occupation but that of the sword.
The education of the times was conformable
to this circumstance; the only persons who
were made partakers of a liberal instruction,
were either the junior monks within the walls
of their respective cloisters, or the individuals

Method of
education
previous-
ly to the
establis-
ment of
the uni-
versities.

CHAP. X. destined to the station of secular priests, who received the necessary previous learning in cathedral schools, under the conduct and inspection of the bishops in their different dioceses.

Rise of
Cam-
bridge
and Ox-
ford.

In these times the universities languished. Whatever pretensions they may have to a remoter antiquity, obscured by the dust of ages and the rarity of authentic records, it was not till literature came to be regarded as a desirable acquisition by persons bred to no religious destination, that Oxford and Cambridge arrived to that unequivocal eminence which, with few variations, they have retained to the present day. A circumstantial account of the rise of Cambridge as a place appropriated to education has been transmitted to us by Peter of Blois^b, and the incidents he relates appear to have taken place about the year 1109. Fitzstephen, in a passage already quoted, speaks of the public schools of London in a

^b Continuatio Hist. Ingulph.

style strongly favourable to the notion, that CHAP. X.
in the time in which he wrote they were a
novelty, that is, in the reign of Henry II.

The fountains of general learning however
were scarcely thrown open to persons of all
orders and denominations in the state, before
they were resorted to with a thirst, propor-
tioned to the long abstinence to which man-
kind had been subjected. Fitzstephen speaks
of his schools as very numerous attended.
Peter of Blois*, observes that the professors
who first opened their courses of science at
Cambridge, "began with hiring a barn in
which they might deliver their lectures: but
that in a little time they drew together a
great number of scholars; and in the second
year the resort, both from the town and the
whole country, was such that no house, barn
or church was found sufficient for their re-
ception." In the year 1209, exactly one hun-
dred years after the period spoken of by this
historian, we find this unequivocal proof of

* ubi supra.

CHAP. X. the flourishing condition in which Oxford had previously been, that, exasperated by an oppressive and arbitrary proceeding of king John, three thousand members of the university abandoned Oxford in that year, and withdrew themselves to Cambridge and other places, where they hoped in tranquillity and peace to be permitted to pursue the course of their studies^d. Thus it appears that, in a very short time after the establishment of our universities in their present form, they became more considerable, so far as respects the number of their members, than at present.

Prosperous
condition
of the
univer-
sities.

But still more extraordinary things are related on this subject. It is affirmed by the most accurate investigators, that in the twelfth century the multitude of students in the university of Paris, exceeded even the number of the citizens^e. The then archbishop of Armagh in the kingdom of Ireland, delivered a discourse at Avignon before pope Inno-

^d Wood, Hist. & Antiq. Oxon. ad ann.

^e Histoire Literaire de la France, douzième siecle, §. 91.

cent VI. in the year 1357, in which he affirms CHAP. X. that “even in his time Oxford had contained thirty thousand scholars^f ;” though he adds that it had since fallen so much into decay, that at the time at which he was speaking it scarcely contained six thousand.

The causes of this decay are singular, and strongly characteristic of the times in which they occurred. It is ascribed by the archbishop to the influx of “mendicant friars, who entice and delude so many of the young scholars to enter into their order, that parents choose rather to make their children husbandmen and retain them, than by making them scholars to lose them for ever.” These mendicants first obtained permission to establish their fraternities in Oxford in the beginning of the thirteenth century^g, and in no very long time became so formidable rivals to the university as to threaten it with total ruin.

Their decline.

^f Bulæus, Hist. Uni. Paris. sub anno. Wood seems to speak of the same number at a later period. Antiq. Oxon. A. D. 1349.

^g Fuller, Church History, B. VI. Sect. 1.

CHAP. X.

Monks and
friars.

The orders of regular priests in the Roman Catholic church, that is, of such as had taken the vows of perpetual poverty and chastity, are usually distributed under two heads, those of monks and of friars. The great basis of distinction between these classes, as derived from the principles of their original institution, was, that the monks were forbidden to possess any private property, but had all things in common, while the friars abjured the possession of all property, whether private or in common^b. The monks therefore soon came to possess, from the donations and bequests of the pious, immense revenues. They inhabited stately buildings, the very ruins of which, in the eye of the man who loves to transport himself into the times of old, are still among the ornaments of the lands in which they lived. Augustine, the first who undertook the conversion of our Saxon progenitors to the Christian faith, was a Benedictine monk; all the abbeyes in England, pre-

^b Fuller, ubi supra.

viously to the Norman conquest, were filled CHAP. X.
 with the votaries of this order; and, down
 to the reformation, all the mitred and par-
 liamentary abbots of England, except the
 prior of the knights of Saint John of Jeru-
 salem, were Benedictinesⁱ. The friars, through
 all their denominations and divisions, were
 universally mendicant.

The universities, among the various causes
 of their rise and flourishing condition, owed
 much to the decline of reputation in the mo-
 nastic orders. As the monasteries grew rich,
 they became luxurious. Even in the darkest
 ages of ignorance, the contrast between their
 solemn professions of poverty and humility
 on the one hand, and the splendour of their
 living and the immensity of their pride on
 the other, could scarcely fail to strike the
 beholders. Pride is far from being incom-
 patible with moral and virtuous feelings; and
 the proudest prelates of the middle ages were
 those who felt the most confidence in their

Discredit
 of the
 monastic
 orders.

ⁱ Fuller, ubi supra.

CHAP. X. own worth, and the greatest disdain of every thing low, ungenerous and corrupt. But the ill fame and popular aversion which now began to be directed against the monastic orders, had the most fatal effect upon their morals. Finding they were no longer venerated as they had lately been, they speedily declined into the realising those vices, which at first malice and envy had only whispered against them.

Rise of the
mendi-
cants.

The character of the monastic orders no sooner appeared to be on the wane, than a new race of men sprung up in the persons of the friars, who speedily engrossed as much reputation, and were every where held in as great honour and esteem, as the monks had been in the days of their greatest purity. The friars had no magnificent palaces like the monks, no thrones, painted windows and stately architecture ; they were for the most part wanderers on the face of the earth. In these respects they professed to act on the model of Christ and his apostles ; to “ take no thought for the morrow ;” to have no place “ where to lay their head ;” and to be

indebted for the necessities of existence to CHAP. X.
the spontaneous affection and kindness of the
people whose neighbourhood they chanced to
frequent. They freely imparted to the pro-
fane laity their spiritual gifts ; and in return
received from them those slender attentions
and donations which might enable them to
support life. They exercised the occupation
of beggars ; and they undertook peremptorily
to maintain in their sermons that Jesus Christ
and his disciples demanded, and subsisted
upon, the alms of their countrymen.

It is not wonderful that, in the ages we
are contemplating, persons holding out these
professions should obtain the approbation of
their contemporaries. But they did not stop
here. Though beggars and wanderers on
the earth, they determined to exhibit in their
lives every proof of the most indefatigable
industry. “ The lazy monk ” had become
a term of general disapprobation and obloquy.
They resolved to be in all respects the reverse
of the monk. They did not hide in cloistered
walls, and withdraw themselves from the in-
spection and comments of mankind. They

CHAP. X. were always before the public, and were constantly employed in the pious offices of counsel, comfort, admonition, preaching and prayer. In pursuit of these objects they spared no fatigue ; they hastened from place to place ; and, when their frames might be expected to be worn out with the length of the way, they were still fresh and alert, without repose and almost without aliment, for all the offices of disinterested toil and Christian instruction, and all the duties of men incessantly watchful for the salvation of their fellow-creatures. This was their labour, their study, their refreshment and their joy.

One of the various methods in which they laudably aspired to obtain the good will of their contemporaries, was by their incredible exertions in the acquisition of learning. We should be apt to imagine that men immersed in poverty, greedy of hardships, and continually occupied, as it should seem, in the offices of devotion, would have little leisure for mastering the subtleties of literature. The fact however was otherwise. The great doctors of the latter part of the thirteenth and

the commencement of the fourteenth century were almost universally friars. They first settled in England about the year 1230. Grossteste bishop of Lincoln, the great ornament of those times, was their devoted patron^k. Roger Bacon, who was born about the year 1214, was the boast of the rule of St. Francis, as he is the boast of human nature: though indeed this wonderful man so far outran the progress of his age, as finally to become an object of persecution to the heads of his own order. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Occam, the most eminent names in the catalogue of the schoolmen, were mendicants.

When all these circumstances are taken together, it will not be wondered at that the mendicant orders every where proved such powerful rivals to the universities. They had the advantage in point of literature and the splendour of genius. But they had a further advantage, which in those times was deemed

Their prosperous career.

^k Pegge's Life of Grossteste.

CHAP. X. of the greatest importance. The universities professed to prepare young persons for the scenes and occupations of active life. But so many of these young persons as were really pervaded with a passion for knowledge, looked with no great complacency upon a literary leisure, fugitive in its nature, and which was soon to give way to profane and ordinary pursuits. Even such as were destined for the various stations of the church, still found the occupiers of those stations branded with the name of secular. We can with difficulty form a conception, in these later ages, of the ardour and entire devotion with which men of pure and ethereal spirits at that time dedicated themselves to literary labour and contemplation. It was most suitable to their feelings to cast off at once the projects of ambition and aspirations after wealth, and by a solemn engagement to sequester themselves for ever from the world and its vanities. The religious passion came in aid of their literary propensities. They made themselves sacred, and became the favourites of heaven, not through the means

of suppressing, but while they indulged with-
 out limit and control, the reigning passion of
 their hearts. These various incitements were
 particularly in correspondence with the ardent
 and generous temper of young men just verg-
 ing toward the period of maturity; and it
 was therefore natural that parents, "seeing
 the great ascendancy which the inticements
 of the mendicant friars gave them over the
 minds of youth, should be afraid to send their
 children to the university¹."

The personal history of St. Thomas Aquinas
 is remarkably adapted to illustrate these ob-
 servations. At seventeen years of age, that is, in
 the year 1241, being then a student at the uni-
 versity of Naples, he entered himself, without
 the knowledge of his family, into the order
 of preaching friars, or Dominicans. His mo-
 ther, being informed of this, used her utmost
 efforts to detach him from the engagements
 he had made; to prevent which the Do-
 minicans successively removed him from Na-

Thomas
 Aquinas.

¹ Archbishop of Armagh.

CHAP. X. ples to Terracina, from Terracina to Anagnia, and from Anagnia to Rome. His mother followed him in each of these removals, but could not obtain permission of the friars even to see him. At length, under the direction of his superiors he undertook a journey to Paris; and, being waylaid by his elder brothers, was carried off, and secured in his mother's castle of Aquino. Here he remained two years in a sort of imprisonment; but, having watched an opportunity, he at last effected his escape, and returned into the bosom of the order from which he had been violently separated^m. If the system and policy of these friars gained so extraordinary an ascendancy over a youth of the most independent mind, and not born to be controlled, we may easily figure to ourselves what must be the extent of their influence in regard to the mass of young persons to the inveigling of whom their arts were directed.

^m Cave, *Historia Literaria*, art. Aquinas,

From the sum of these particulars it ap-
pears that the most flourishing period in the
history of the Western universities, was the
twelfth and part of the thirteenth centuries.

They succeeded to the monks, and were
themselves in turn brought down from their
populousness and pride by the friars. The
expression in the discourse of the archbishop
of Armagh already quoted is, that "even in
his time Oxford had contained thirty thou-
sand scholars." But, when a man speaks of
an event as having occurred "even in his
time," he is of course to be supposed to
allude to something as remote as the period
of his life, and the natural capacity of his
memory, will allow. Chaucer's studentship
preceded only by eleven years the time of
the archbishop's discourse. The number of
scholars at the university therefore at the
time when Chaucer resided there, is rather to
be taken at about six thousand, the number
assigned by the archbishop to the time at
which he was speaking.

Till beyond the middle of the thirteenth
century the scholars at our universities had

CHAP. X.
Colleges,
when
founded.

CHAP. X. no houses or lodgings, but such as they rented from the private citizens of the towns in which their studies were pursued. Many inconveniences had flowed from this cause; and, as will always happen when the quantity of any commodity is limited, and the number of those who are desirous to purchase is great, enormous prices were sought to be put upon their accommodations by the proprietors. Frequent and vexatious disputes had arisen^a. At length the public spirited and munificent turned their attention to this grievance, and became willing to allot some of those funds to the erection of halls and colleges, which had formerly been devoted to the building of abbeys and convents. This passion was at its height in the reign of Edward III. In the period of Chaucer's youth little progress had been made in this system. Cambridge attracted the attention of the generous somewhat later than Oxford; and, as there were only two or three small

^a Wood's Hist. Oxon. passim.

colleges then in existence at that place, we CHAP. X.
 may with great probability infer that Chaucer
 was one of those students who lodged pro-
 miscuously among the citizens of Cambridge.

An extraordinary passage occurs in bishop Lowth's valuable Life of William of Wykeham, which it is to our present purpose to examine. "Whoever," says this writer, "considers the miserable state of learning in general, and in particular in the University of Oxford, in that age, will not think it any disadvantage to Wykeham to have been led into a different course of studies."

[University
 education
 of the
 four-
 teenth
 century
 appre-
 ciated.]

"It was just at the time [see Ant. Wood, Hist. Univ. Oxon. ad an. 1343] when Wykeham must have been at the University of Oxford, if he had ever been there at all, that certain logical contentions, turning merely upon words, so far prevailed, as to divide the scholars into perpetual factions, and to become almost the only object of their studies and attention. The Nominals listed themselves under the standard of Occham the Invincible Doctor, in opposition to the Reals, the followers of Duns Scotus, entitled the

CHAP. X. Subtile Doctor.—Six years spent at the University just at this time, and in that part of life in which prejudices of all kinds take the fastest hold and make the most lasting impression, might have unhappily given a wrong turn to a person of as great a genius, as extensive knowledge, and as sound judgment, as any which that age produced. As he had a capacity, that would probably have carried him to the top of any profession, into which he might have chanced to be thrown, he might indeed have become an eminent Schoolman; an Irrefragable, perhaps, or even a Seraphic Doctor: but we should have absolutely lost the great statesman, and the generous patron and promoter of true learning °.”

In this passage it is easy to discern a whimsical sort of contention, between the churchman, the historian of the founder of colleges and schools, on the one hand; and on the other the biographer zealous for the honour

° Life of Wykeham, Sect. I.

of his hero, the optimist of a new mode, who CHAP. X. is determined to find that every thing which happened to the person he is commemorating, is the best thing which could have happened. To make out his position, bishop Lowth should have proved that in those days no great statesman, and no generous patron and promoter of true learning, that is, no founder of colleges, was bred at either of our universities.

Without opening the general question of the advantages and disadvantages of an university education, nothing can be more clear, than that doctor Lowth's objection to such an education in the fourteenth century, is in its principal points equally applicable to any time from the fourteenth century to the present hour. When were the arts of life, and those which are most immediately adapted to action and business, made the principal objects of attention either at Oxford or Cambridge? When was not the science of logic most assiduously, perhaps too emphatically and earnestly, pursued? When has not Aristotle been applauded and recommended

CHAP. X. as almost the complete model of human perfection?

But, without doctor Lowth perceiving it, the vulgar sophism lurks in this passage, that an architect as Wykeham was should only study architecture, that a statesman as Wykeham was should only study politics, and that abstruse and severe scholarship withers the genius, curbs the fancy, and renders a man unfit for elegant and original composition, or for a just and masterly conception of public affairs and the business of the world. This is a gross error. Man is a being of vast and various capacity, and is likely to fill the higher place in the scale of his species, in proportion as he has stored his mind with manifold knowledge. All sciences and studies reflect light upon each other. But, beside this, various knowledge enlarges and elevates the human capacity. Charles the Fifth said that, as many languages as a man could speak, so many times might he be affirmed to be a man. This remark might be more fitly applied to a liberal and enlarged education. A great magazine of knowledge inspires its

possessor with a graceful confidence ; he is CHAP. X. conscious of his wealth, and disburses it freely ; he wanders over the whole field of his subject or his business, and does not encounter a fence or an abattis at every turn. Mathematics may be a laborious study ; the learned languages may be of tedious acquirement ; etymology, or the knowledge of the affinities of speech, may be repulsive ; logic may be supersubtle and disputatious ; similar objections may be urged against natural history, civil history, law, commerce, anatomy, medicine, chemistry, and every branch of human knowledge : but the greater number of these a man has acquired, the more vigorous will he feel himself to be ; and he who confines his attention to the immediate object of his pursuit, will be superficial and precarious even in that. Studies which shall, perhaps justly, be thought too nice in their research, or too remote from the affairs of life, yet refine the mind, defecate its grossnesses, and enable it to recognise and apply, so to express myself, the cleanness and springiness of its muscular powers.

CHAP. IX.

Logic studied with peculiar success.

The thirteenth century was the period in which that description of human geniuses, called the schoolmen, principally flourished. Whatever we may decide of their pursuits, many of which appear to be, and many of which really were, frivolous, no competent judge after having looked carefully into what they did, will regard them as objects of contempt. They may be considered as the discoverers of the art of logic. The ancients possessed in an eminent degree the gift of genius ; but they have little to boast on the score of arrangement, and discover little skill in the strictness of an accurate deduction. They rather arrive at truth by means of a felicity of impulse, than in consequence of having regularly gone through the process which leads to it. A strict logic may easily be prized at too high a rate. It is a machine too mighty to be directed by the strength of human intellect ; and therefore the benefits to be derived from employing it are much slenderer than at first we might be led to imagine. The pure dialectician is soon bewildered in the labyrinth of his own terms ;

when he seems to be most accurate, he often CHAP. X. becomes most absurd; strict deduction, even in mathematics, will sometimes lead to untenable conclusions. He who trusts much to sentiment, to impulse, to intuition, will often be freest from absurdities, and be conducted to the most useful and beautiful modes of viewing either nature or man. But, though logic is not to be used too indiscriminately, or trusted too implicitly, it is an instrument of high value when confined within a proper sphere. It is a touchstone enabling us to reject with satisfaction many of the impositions which might otherwise be passed upon us; it is a branch of learning enabling us to arrange, in the clearest and most advantageous point of view, many of those truths which it may be necessary for us to communicate to another. While engaged in the strictness of logical deduction, we seem to be eminently exercising those powers by which we are distinguished from the rest of the animal kingdom; and man is but half himself, till he is able to employ with subtlety and acute-

CHAP. X. ness this instrument for establishing truth and confounding error.

Other sciences imported from the Moors.

But, beside the art of logic, which never in any age before or since flourished in such perfection as during the pupilage of Chaucer, the period we are examining was by no means unlearned, in almost any of those branches of knowledge which are most interesting to man. The foundations upon which the schoolmen built their improvements, were borrowed from the Arabians of the Saracenic empire. The religion which furnished the first occasion to the growth of this power, had sprung up in an age of the deepest ignorance; and the first caliphs, simple, enthusiastic and austere in their manners, discountenanced both by precept and practice the cultivation of profane learning^p. But, as the paroxysm of the religious feeling subsided, and as wealth flowed in upon the masters of this potent dominion, they became luxurious, tasteful and refined, friendly to

^p Gibbon, Decline of the Roman Empire, Ch. L.v

the arts of life and the investigations of sci- CHAP. X.
ence. Under Almamon* in particular, who
ascended the throne of Bagdad in the year
813, the Saracens penetrated into the stores
of Greek literature, and translated all the
authors they most admired into their verna-
cular tongue[†]. The poets and historians
they treated with neglect; but they attached
themselves to the physicians, the mathema-
tical writers, the astronomers, and above all
the rest to Aristotle. In many instances they
made distinguished improvements upon the
materials they acquired; and they are usually
considered as the fathers of chemistry, arith-
metic and algebra. It was not long before
the inquisitive of Europe became aware that
Bagdad had been the centre of knowledge
and politeness, at a time when their own
climate had been sunk in barbarism: and the
soldiers of the Holy Cross, while they tri-
umphed over the miserable remains of this

* Enfield, Abridgment of Brueker's History of Philo-
sophy, B. V, chap. i.

CHAP. X. once mighty empire, opened to their countrymen a communication with the learning of the East. Roger Bacon, Alfonso king of Castille, and others, refined upon the materials they imported; and the fourteenth century was far from being unfamiliar with the most considerable branches of natural knowledge.

Circumstances favourable to the cultivation of the fancy.

Such was the cultivation which then existed with respect to pure reasoning and intellect. Nor was the period much less fortunate in those particulars which tend to awaken the imagination, to inspire feeling, to guide the mind amidst all the luxuries of day-dreams and fiction, and to generate and cherish the poetical character. The Greek language indeed was almost universally neglected: but the Latin classics met with a due degree of attention; and, if the purest and most correct of these were not regarded with the highest favour, those however which were principally in vogue, were the classics who are most profuse in imagery, and boldest in incident. We have already seen how the refinements of chivalry, subtilised and elevated as they were

in the fictions of romance, soothed the minds, CHAP. X.
 and gave a peculiar character to the tempers,
 of the contemporaries of Chaucer. When
 we have collected all these particulars into
 one point of view, we shall easily be led to
 confess that it was no mean school in which
 the great father of English poetry was pre-
 pared for the career he had to run.

It was the good fortune of Chaucer that he
 led the early years of his life in scenes of
 concourse and variety, that he was condemned
 to no premature and compulsory solitude, and
 that his mind was not suffered to vegetate in
 that indolence and vacancy which, when they
 occupy an extensive portion of human life,
 are so destructive and deadly to the intellectual
 powers. He was born in London. In the
 midst of this famous and flourishing metro-
 polis he was, as he expresses it, "forth-
 grownen." His father was probably a mer-
 chant; and Chaucer was furnished from his
 earliest hours of observation, with an oppor-
 tunity of remarking upon the insensible
 growth of that new rank of men, the bur-
 gesses, which about this time gave a new face

State of the
 early
 years of
 Chaucer
 recapitu-
 lated.

CHAP. X. to the political constitutions of Europe. Private and domestic education had scarcely any where been heard of; and Chaucer in all probability frequented some of those populous and tumultuary schools so circumstantially described by William Fitzstephen. Here his mind was excited by example, and stimulated by rivalship; he passed much of his time in the society of his equals, observed their passions, and acted and was acted upon in turn by their sentiments and pursuits. When he had finished his classes here, he was removed to Cambridge, where six thousand fellow-students waited to receive him. He had no difficulty in finding solitude when his inclination prompted him to seek it, and we may be certain that a mind which relished so exquisitely the beauties of nature, sought it often; but he was never palled with it. The effect of both these circumstances is conspicuous in his writings. He is fond of allegories and reveries, for oft the poet

——“brush'd with hasty step the dews away,
To meet the sun;”

and he is the poet of manners, because he CHAP. X.
 frequented the haunts of men, and was ac-
 quainted with his species in all their varieties
 of modification.

At the age of eighteen, and while yet a stu-
 dent in the university of Cambridge, Chaucer
 produced a poem, entitled the Court of Love,
 consisting, as it has come down to us of 1444
 lines, but which could not originally have
 consisted of fewer than two thousand verses.
 This poem was first assigned to the pen
 by John Skow, the well known compiler of
 the Chronicle of England, in an edition he
 gave of the works of Chaucer in the year
 1501. No manuscript of it is known to
 exist. It is impossible however to ascertain

CHAP. XI.
 1346
 Early pro-
 duction
 of Chaucer
 etc.

CHAP. XI.

COMPOSITIONS OF CHAUCER WHILE A STUDENT
AT CAMBRIDGE.—ENTITLED TO BE CONSIDERED
AS THE FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY.—STATE
OF POETRY IN EUROPE PREVIOUS TO THE WRIT-
INGS OF CHAUCER.—CHARACTERS OF WILLIAM
DE LORRIS, DANTE AND PETRARCA.

CHAP. XI. **AT** the age of eighteen, and while yet a stu-
dent in the university of Cambridge, Chaucer
produced a poem, entitled the Court of Love,
consisting, as it has come down to us, of 1443
lines, but which could not originally have
consisted of fewer than two thousand.

1346.
Early pro-
ductions
of Chau-
cer.

This poem was first committed to the press
by John Stow, the well known compiler of
the Chronicle of England, in an edition he
gave of the works of Chaucer in the year
1561. No manuscript of it is known to
exist. It is impossible however to entertain

a rational doubt of its authenticity. The CHAP. XI.
 manner in which it is written is precisely 1346.
 the manner of Chaucer; and it is conspicuously superior to the composition of any other English poet, from the dawn of our language to Sackville earl of Dorset, whose poetical career commenced from about the time when Stow's edition of Chaucer made its appearance.

The poem of the Court of Love bears internal evidence of having been written by its author at the age of eighteen; in other words, in the year 1346. In the course of the tale Chaucer takes occasion to style himself "Philogenet of Cambridge clerke^a:" the period of the action of the poem is expressly referred to the time when the author was "xviii yere of age^b:" and part of the action consists, in his seeing for the first time the mistress to whose service he professes to devote himself. Now there is no need of many arguments to prove, that the time at which

^a ver. 912, 913.

^b ver. 43, 124.

CHAP. XI. a man is most likely to celebrate, and dwell
 1346. with exultation upon, an incident of this nature as the matter uppermost in his mind, is while the incident itself is still recent. Add to which, the writer sets out with the most unreserved confession of his noviceship and inexperience.

I write, as he that none intelligence
 Of metres hath, ne floures of sentence.

ver. 4.

And again,

And ye that ben metrichiens me excuse,

ver. 30.

From all these circumstances we may infer, with as much evidence as can be expected in such a question, that the poem of the Court of Love was actually written at the date here assigned to it.

Yet, however early be the period at which this composition was produced, we are well assured that it was by no means Chaucer's first essay in the art of poetry. In the body

of the work he takes care to inform us, ad- CHAP. XI.
 dressing his mistress with an enumeration of 1346.
 the qualities and accomplishments by which
 he hopes to recommend himself to her fa-
 vour,

In art of love I write, and songés make,
 That may be song in honour of the kyng
 And quene of love.

ver. 897.

It is probably to some of these juvenile ef-
 fusions that he alludes, when he says, re-
 hearsing the titles of several of his works, in
 the Prologue to the Legend of Good Wo-
 men,

He made the boke, &c.

And many an hymné for your holy daies,

That highten balades, rondils, virelaies ;

He hath made many a ley and many a thing.

ver. 417.

Gower also, the contemporary and friend of
 Chaucer, is to be considered as referring to
 the same compositions, when, in his *De Con-*

CHAP. XI *fessione Amantis*, he introduces Venus as con-
 1346. fiding to him a message of acknowledgment
 to our author,

For, in the floures of his youth,
 In sondry wyse, as he well couth,
 Of ditees and of songés glade,
 The whiche he for my sake ymade.

BOOK VII, fol. 190.

They are
 written in
 English.

Before we enter upon a particular examination of any of Chaucer's poems, it is proper that we should pay some attention to the circumstance of their being written in the English tongue. This language, as has already been remarked, after the accession of the Norman race to the throne of our island, was consigned to oblivion and contempt, driven from the seats of refinement and learning, and confined for the most part to the cottages of the peasantry. Before the period of Chaucer we had already had poets; Wace and Benoit may most properly be considered as ours; and the English monarchs were among the most conspicuous and mu-

nificant in the list of patrons of the literature of that age. But Wace and Benoit wrote the language of the Northern French. English indeed, or Saxon (for our ideas on this subject will be rendered more accurate by our considering these as two names for the same thing), had always continued the language of the bulk of the inhabitants of this island; and a few efforts from time to time show themselves, to perpetuate our native tongue in the form of poetry. Layamon, an English monk, translated the Brut of Wace in no long time after it was written; and Robert of Gloucester and Robert Manning composed certain rhyming chronicles of the history of England about the end of the thirteenth century. But none of these attempts were much calculated to excite the ardour and ambition of their contemporaries: the English continued to be the language of barbarity and rudeness, while the French had in its favour the fashion which countenanced it, the refinement of those who wrote it, and the variety and multitude of their productions and inventions.

CHAP. XL

1346.

CHAP. XI.

1346.
Advantages
arising
from this
circum-
stance.

Chaucer saw immediately in which way the path of fame was most open to his access; that it was by the cultivation of his native tongue: and his seeing this at the early age of eighteen is no common proof of the magnitude of his powers. It has been well observed^c that the English language rose with the rise of the Commons; an event which first discovers itself in the reign of John, and which was ascertained and fixed under Edward I. Chaucer perhaps perceived, and was the first to perceive, that from this era the English tongue must necessarily advance in purity, in popularity and in dignity, and finally triumph over every competitor within the circuit of its native soil. The poet therefore in the realm of England who wrote for permanence, was bound by the most urgent motives to write in this language.

Nor was the prosperous career our language was about to run, by any means the only, or the strongest, argument for recurring to the

^c Warton, Vol. I, Sect. i.

use of it. For the poet to attempt to express CHAP. XI.
his thoughts in French, was for him volun- 1346.
tarily to subject himself to many of the disadvantages which attend the attempt to write poetry in a dead language. What is so written can scarcely be entirely worthy of the name of poetry. It can but weakly convey the facility of our thoughts, or the freshness of our impressions. Chaucer was a genuine Englishman, a native of our island, hitherto confined within our shores, and born in the class of our burgesses and merchants. French was to him probably like a foreign language: all his boyish feelings had been expressed in English: English words were mingled and associated with all the scenes he had beheld, and all the images he had conceived. For a man to communicate the thoughts he has formed in one language in the words of another, is a position not less unfortunate, than to be condemned to contemplate a beautiful woman, not by turning our eyes immediately upon her person, but by regarding her figure as shadowed in a mirror.

CHAP. XL. 1346. To master any language is a task too great for the narrow space of human life. It is perfectly true, however paradoxical it may sound, that the man never yet existed who was completely possessed of the treasures of his native tongue. Many delicacies and shades of meaning, many happy combinations and arrangements of words, are familiar to one man, of which his neighbour is ignorant; while on the other hand his neighbour possesses stores of a similar sort, to which he is a stranger. Those also which have once been observed by any man, obviously divide themselves into two classes; one which he has always at hand, and may be conceived in a certain sense as making part of himself; and the other, phrases and expressions which he once knew and comprehended, but which now he rarely remembers or has totally forgotten. If then no man ever yet possessed the treasures of his native tongue, what presumption or fatuity ought it to be accounted, for him voluntarily to undergo the disadvantage of expressing himself in another? Add to which; even when we have mastered

the supposed foreign language, we can still CHAP. XI.
 give in it no more than the copy of the
 words of our early years, words which re-
 latively to us may almost be considered as
 the ideas themselves.

Chaucer has hitherto by all writers on the
 history of our language been robbed of the
 honour here ascribed to him, through a hasty
 and inadvertent inference which seemed to
 follow from a comparison of his age with
 that of his friend and contemporary, Gower.
 Gower is commonly supposed to have been
 the elder of the two; and this hypothesis
 receives considerable support from the epi-
 thet by which Chaucer addresses him in the
 conclusion of his juvenile poem of Troilus
 and Creseide, "the moral Gower^d;" an
 epithet more likely to be applied by a young
 man to his elder, than to either his junior
 or his equal. The inference has received
 further confirmation from an inconsiderate
 application of the term "discyple," by which

Question
 of priority
 between
 Chaucer
 and
 Gower.

^d Book V, ver. 1855.

CHAP. XI. Chaucer is spoken of in Gower's poem, entitled *De Confessione Amantis*^e. Some persons have from this passage been impressed with the idea, that Gower did not hesitate to assume to himself the honour of having modelled the literary character of Chaucer; and have naturally concluded that that writer to whom another is a disciple, is to be considered as assisting him with his advice, and not improbably as guiding him by his example. Hence a feeling has been propagated, as if Gower recommended it to our author to compose in English, and showed him the way^f. It seems probable however, from reasons which will appear hereafter, that Chaucer had no knowledge of Gower at the time that he composed his Court of Love. Nor could the difference of their ages be much in favour of Gower, since he was in some degree an active man and a courtier, at the

^e Book VII, fol. 190.

^f *Theatrum Poetarum*, Part II. Johnson, History of the English Language, prefixed to his Dictionary.

accession of Henry IV, when Chaucer was CHAP. XI.
1346.
upward of seventy. At all events, the word
“discyple” in the passage alluded to, can
have no weight in the present question: since
it is not of Gower, but of Venus, that
Chaucer is said to be the disciple. The
Goddess is introduced speaking, and in the
course of her speech, addressing herself to
Gower, she adds,

And grete well Chaucer, whan ye mete,
As my discyple and my poete;
For, in the floures of his youth, &c.

But that Chaucer is entitled to the pre-
cedency in order of time as an English poet,
appears to admit of demonstrative evidence.
The works we possess of Gower are, 1. Fifty
Ballads in French, 2. *Speculum Meditantis*;
of various subjects of virtue and vice, conju-
gal fidelity, &c.: a poem in ten books, and
also in French, 3. *Confessio Amantis*; a dia-
logue between a lover and his confessor, in-
terspersed with stories, in English^s, 4. *Vox*

^s This work only has been printed.

CHAP. XI. *Clamantis*; a poem on the insurrection of the commons under Richard II; in seven books of elegiac verse, and written in Latin. It is with the third of these pieces only that our enquiry is anywise concerned.

1346.

Gower himself informs us, that this work was written at the request of king Richard II; and, has even furnished us with the precise date of its publication, the sixteenth year of Richard^h, in other words, in the year 1392 or 1393. Chaucer therefore, as it will hereafter abundantly appear, had already produced all his great works, except the Canterbury Tales. His Troilus and Creseide, his Palamon and Arcite, his House of Fame, and his version of the Romaunt of the Rose, were in every man's hands, and every man contended who should be loudest in their praise. Gower at length was awaked from his lethargy, was excited by the unparalleled success of his friend's productions, threw off the trammels of a foreign tongue, and tried

^h Prologue, fol. 1.

from the example of his junior to tune his CHAP. XI.
 native idiom to the harp of the muses.
 Gower at the age of sixty and upward
 learned to write English, which Chaucer had
 written at the age of eighteen.

It is impossible for us to discover at this
 distance of time, what accidental circum-
 stances favoured this early manifestation of
 Chaucer's genius, and led him to aspire to
 the noble character of poet. He had patrons;
 but their patronage was the fruit and not the
 cause of his literary excellence; and John of
 Gaunt, who was afterward his most illus-
 trious protector, was at this time not more
 than six years old. He had literary friends,
 a Gower and a Strode; but it is probable
 their friendship was acquired by him after
 the period of which we are now treating.
 Alone, in the silence of his juvenile studies,
 surrounded with monks and friars and school-
 men, hearing no accents but those of ultra-
 marine French and an uncouth and disputa-
 tious Latin, his memory dwelt with fondness
 upon the dialogue of youthful frolic or of
 domestic tenderness, and he conceived the

Chaucer's
 eulo-
 gium.

CHAP. XI. generous and daring project of breathing
 1346. poetry into a tongue, hitherto little familiar-
 ised with the luxuriances of fancy, and
 which the polite and the learned were eager
 to treat with contumelious disdain.

Poets on
 the con-
 tinent
 previous
 to Chau-
 cer.

But, if Chaucer is well entitled to be con-
 sidered as original in his attempt to model
 his native tongue to the language of poetry,
 he is certainly much less so in the particular
 structure and design of the different perform-
 ances he has left behind him. Several of them
 are avowedly translations; and the rest, how-
 ever much they display of original genius,
 are obviously formed upon the model of the
 different French and Italian poets who were
 his contemporaries, or had only by a very
 short time preceded him. Before therefore
 we can with propriety enter upon the imme-
 diate examination of his productions, it will
 be necessary to take a brief review of the state
 of poetry on the continent, previously to the
 middle of the fourteenth century.

Writers of
 romance,

We have already had occasion to refer to
 the primary sources of the vernacular poetry
 of this period, the productions of the pre-

tended Turpin and Geoffrey of Monmouth. CHAP. XI.

Before the appearance of these writings such poetry existed ; for poetry will almost always be found among the characteristic amusements of barbarian tribes ; the Saxons, the Franks and the Normans had each of them their songs. After the publication of these histories, if not before, existed the songs of Roland and other heroes, who figure in their pages. Yet we may, without much inaccuracy, assume the productions of Wace and Benoit, and the times of our Henry II, for the commencement of modern European poetry strictly so called, and of a new species of composition, making an eminent figure in literary history, the record of romantic adventures, described with copiousness and detail, in the vernacular tongue, and in rhyming verse.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, France was broken into two great divisions, separated from each other for the greater part by the course of the Loire, and each of them possessing a language of its own, entirely distinct from the speech of the

Romance
and Pro-
vençal
language :

CHAP. XI.

otherⁱ. These languages have sometimes been distinguished by the epithets of the Norman or Romance tongue on the one hand, and the Provençal on the other; so called, perhaps because the most observable rhymers of these languages were inhabitants of the province of Normandy, or of the country of Provence. It has been a subject of enquiry among the respective favourers of these two classes of writers, which of them is entitled to the honours of eldership; but the question itself is lost in the darkness of antiquity, and it is probable that neither tongue, from the first dawn of its formation, was ever entirely destitute of poets. The first troubadour, or Provençal poet, on record, is William IX, count of Poitou, who is said to have been born in the year 1071, and to have died in 1122^k.

Till within a few years the troubadours or

ⁱ Le Grand, *Fabliaux ou Contes du 12^e. et du 13^e. siècle*, Preface.

^k *Histoire Littéraire des Troubadours*, Tom. I.

Provençal poets have completely borne away CHAP. XI.
the palm of celebrity from the poets of the
northern provinces of France. They are dis-
tinctly named, and spoken of in terms of
warm approbation, by Dante and Petrarca. It
has however recently been questioned, and,
as it seems, not without powerful reasons,
whether the merits of the writers of the Ro-
mance tongue are not decisively superior to
the merits of the Provençals. M. de St.
Palaye, author of the Memoirs upon Ancient
Chivalry, made the most elaborate researches
into this subject; and the result of his col-
lections appears to be unfavourable to the
troubadours¹. Of the great number of ro-
mances, the produce of the twelfth and thir-
teenth centuries, four only are said to have
come from the southern division of France¹.
The case of the *Fabliaux*, or Tales, which
being translated into other languages, or at-
tired in new ornaments, have given immor-
tality to Boccaccio and La Fontaine, is not

¹ Le Grand, Preface, p. xxxvii.

CHAP. XI. less decisive : they are almost exclusively the inventions of the northern French^m. The troubadours produced little else than love-ditties, and certain ebullitions of satire, called *sirventes*ⁿ; while the Normans generated the most beautiful inventions and the richest harvest of imagination, the delight and admiration of future ages, affording materials to the diversified talents of Shakespear, and sustenance and nourishment to the sublime capacities of Milton.

Various circumstances obviously contributed to turn the scale in favour of the writers of the Romance French, and against the troubadours. The seat of the court and the metropolis was among the northern provinces; and it is a trite observation to say that the residence of a capital strongly tends to refine and subtilise the genius of man. The French language was carried by William the Norman into England; and in the court of the English princes the Romance poets

^m Le Grand, Preface, p. xlvij. ⁿ Ditto, p. li.

found a new, and as we have seen, a zealous CHAP. XI.
 and ardent patronage. The Normans also
 transported the treasures of their language
 along with them into Sicily. The university
 of Paris was in the thirteenth century pro-
 bably the most celebrated and numerous in
 the world; and students from distant parts
 of Europe resorted to it, to complete their
 education in the learning of the times. All
 these circumstances made way for the bril-
 liant career of the French tongue, and the
 final extinction of the language of the Pro-
 vençals.

One peculiarity of the cultivators of poetry
 in France in the twelfth century, both the
 southern and the northern, is intimately con-
 nected with the examination of the writings
 of Chaucer; the introduction of certain in-
 stitutions, which have been variously styled
 Courts, and Parliaments, of Love. This
 contrivance grew out of the unprecedented
 bias of the most civilised parts of Europe in
 those ages, to treat all questions of gallantry
 with an anxiety and seriousness, such as has

Parlia-
 ments of
 Love.

CHAP. XI. been appropriated in other periods to matters of jurisprudence or of state. Chivalry was at that time the noblest occupation; and the fair sex was treated with a deference, only short of adoration. The Courts of Love appear to have been composed of members of both sexes, though the ladies had clearly the superior weight and preeminence. They have been ludicrously misapprehended by some modern writers, as having actually passed sentences in the manner of a court of judicature, and having afterward carried those sentences into execution. Among these one has been mentioned, ordering two men to be whipped with branches of rose-trees for having divulged the secrets of love: a second, declaring a woman common and the rightful property of every comer, as being convicted of having once sold her most precious favours: a third, freeing a cordelier from the vows he had contracted, because previously to having taken them, he had entered into a vow of perpetual fidelity to his mistress: and a fourth, refusing the rites of sepulture to a lady who

died in rebellion against the jurisdiction of CHAP. XI.
these courts^o.

The Courts of Love however, which make so considerable a figure in the transactions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, did not usurp the powers of a court of judicature, or set themselves in opposition to the established authorities of the state. But their decisions were not less solemn and sacred, than if they had thus usurped. The nicest questions of gallantry and the affairs of love were propounded for their judgment; these questions were usually framed in general terms; they were argued in the affirmative and negative by poets who sought to strengthen their pleas with all the charms of verse; and the determinations which followed were received as inviolable, and appealed to in all future cases. A striking example of this oc-

^o De Sade, Vie de Petrarque, Tom. II, Note xix. This mistake originated in the very obvious and palpable error, of regarding a satirical narration of fictitious events as a real history.

CHAP. XI. curs in the history of Alice, third consort of Louis the Young king of France. This princess held a Court of Love at Troyes in the latter end of the twelfth century; and a question was brought before her, which it appeared had already been determined by the countess of Champagne, daughter of Louis the Young by a former marriage. No sooner were the circumstances of the case laid before the queen, than she exclaimed in tones of resentment and horror, "God forbid that I should be guilty of the arrogance, to dispute the justice of the decisions of the countess of Champagne^p!" The questions argued in these courts were commonly the offspring of the fancy of the proposer, and the pleas which were held partook of the subtleness and dexterity which were at this time so diligently cultivated by the schoolmen in their theological enquiries. These courts are expressly alluded to in the first considerable

^p De Sade, ubi supra.

production of Chaucer's muse, and have furnished a title to that performance. CHAP. XI.

The evidences of the poetical talent which had hitherto occurred in France, consisted of romances, tales and love-songs, *tensons* or pleas in verse, and *sirventes* or the overflowings of a satirical humour. A new era in modern poetry was formed in the middle of the thirteenth century by William de Lorris, author of a work which obtained the highest degree of favour and admiration in those ages, entitled *Le Roman de la Rose*. *Roman de la Rose.* This writer flourished in the time of St. Louis king of France, and of our Henry III^d; and was nearly contemporary with Joinville, the earliest of the vernacular French historians, who has left us a curious and interesting narrative of the transactions of his native sovereign. The author of the *Roman de la Rose* derives his name, agreeably to the custom of those times, from the town of Lorris, eight leagues

^a Fauchet, Origine de la Langue & Poesie Françoise, Liv. II. chap. 125.

CHAP. XI. east of Orleans. Nothing certain has been handed down to us of his profession or his history; and as he left his poem imperfect, being the writer only of 4149 verses, out of 22,734, of which the poem consists, we may find a pleasing melancholy in the reflection, that this eminent genius was probably only shown to the world, and then cut off in the flower of his age, having bequeathed to us this slender sample of what might have been expected from talents like his when matured by experience and observation. The subject of the poem was taken up some years afterward by John de Meun, so called from Meun, another town of France, situated three leagues and a half south-west, as Lorris is eight leagues east, of the episcopal city of Orleans; and who was therefore prompted by vicinity of birth, as well as the admiration of talents, to complete the performance. John de Meun was the author of several other works, a translation of Vegetius *De Arte Veterinaria*, of the Letters of Abelard and Heloise, of Ealred *De Spirituali Amicitia*, of

Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, &c.^r : CHAP. XI.
we have no knowledge of any production of
his predecessor, except the imperfect one we
are here considering.

Of William de Lorris may with great propriety be averred, what Dr. Johnson has asserted of Chaucer, that he was the first of our modern versifiers who taught his native language to express itself poetically. The *Roman de la Rose* is an allegorical tale, representing under the figure of a rose, which the adventurous relater of his own story is anxious to pluck in a garden in which he is wandering, the encouragements and hindrances which attend upon the pursuit of a pure and virtuous love. Allegory is not the most judicious and well-chosen style of poetry; and we are apt to conceive it foreign to the delineation of true passion, and genuine human manners. But it is in several respects a considerable improvement upon the poetry which had been

^r Prologue to the translation of Boethius, by John de Meun, apud Fauchet, Liv. II. chap. 126.

CHAP. XI. most in vogue in the times immediately preceding William de Lorris. The heroes of the tales of romance are too continually on the stretch, and their historians too anxious about their splendour and dignity, to admit, except very accidentally, those little touches of character and starts of sentiment, in which the life and reality of a well-conducted narrative principally consist. Allegory not only gives the greatest possible scope to the fancy in the delineation of its imaginary personages, but, as it exhibits itself in the instance before us, admits of those strokes of familiar life, which at once convert the poet, from the mere entertainer of our leisure hours, into the painter of manners, and the unfolders of the philosophy of the human mind. William de Lorris excelled in both these capacities. We shall have occasion to remark the particular examples of his merit, when we come to treat more minutely of the *Roman de la Rose*, which Chaucer invested in his native English.

France has produced during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a series of men of

eminent talents, who have recorded their CHAP. XI. thoughts and the result of their meditations in verse. These men have written with strong sense, with uncommon consistency and unity of conception, with singular grace and propriety of manner, and with a purity and justness of expression and language worthy of the highest commendation. By a singular fatality they have wanted nothing so much as the very soul and essence of poetry, the employment of the immediate and visible impressions of the senses, to give life to the scenes of the poet, and illustration to his topics. Many of their most admired productions, and many of the best parts of their productions, are distinguished by measure and rhyme only, from a judicious and animated disquisition in prose; and might by a few transpositions and changes of phraseology be converted into simple discourse, without any man having a right to complain that the composer had intrenched upon the privileges and the enthusiastic elevation of a true poet. In this respect William de Lorris is entitled to peculiar commendation. He is no French

CHAP. XI. poet, such as his successors have proved ; but possesses, in a portion adequate to the earliness of his times, the richness of imagery which distinguishes Spenser, and the representation of genuine, living man, as it shines out in the most admired passages of Chaucer.

Rise of Italian poetry.

Contemporary with William de Lorris were the earliest writers in that series of Italian poets, whose works still engage the observation and awaken the delight of the tasteful of their countrymen. At the head of this catalogue, in point of seniority, are usually placed the names of Guitone d'Arezzo and Guido Cavalcanti, the latter of whom died in the year 1300. Guitone was the first who reduced the species of composition denominated sonnet, into that form in which it has ever since been written in Italy and other parts of Europe ; and both he and Cavalcanti composed with no contemptible degree of purity and refinement. But it is to Dante and Petrarca, the successors of these early writers, that the Italian poetry is principally indebted for its eminence. William de Lorris stands by himself among the writers

of French verse, and has no follower worthy CHAP. XI. to build up the structure of which he had so nobly laid the foundation^s. His contemporary Italian poets, on the contrary, prepared the way for geniuses, of a class too eminent for any lapse of time or subsequent accession of refinement to obscure.

Dante is one of those geniuses who in the whole series of human existence most baffle all calculation, and excite unbounded astonishment. Dark as was the age in which he studied and wrote, unfixed and fluctuating as were the then half-formed languages of modern nations, he trampled upon these disadvantages, and presents us with sallies of imagination and energies of composition, which no past age of literature has excelled, and no future can ever hope to excel. This is the distinguishing feature of the poet, by which he inexpressibly excels the mathematician, the natural philosopher, or the cul-

Character
of Dante.

^s Some account of the French poets of the sixteenth century will be given in the twenty-sixth chapter of this work.

CHAP. XI. tivator of science in all the diversity of its branches. Science has a gradual and progressive march ; one discovery prepares the way for another ; the human mind advances with sober and measured steps ; and there is no period at which any great improvement has been gained, when different intellects, perhaps in different countries, had not that very improvement in prospect, and it seemed to be a contest of nice and delicate decision, to whom the improvement belonged, and who, among several persons who did make or would have made the discovery, is most clearly entitled to the praise of it. It is not so in poetry. There the master geniuses, a Homer, a Shakespear and a Milton, seem to belong to no age, but to be the property of the world. They bear indeed some marks of the period in which, and the people among whom they lived, some token of human weakness and infirmity ; but what is best in them resembles nothing in their contemporaries, was prepared by no progression, was copied by no future imitation, and stands off as wide from

competition in all which came immediately CHAP. XI.
after, as in all that had gone before it.

Such a man was Dante. He is not infected, in his immortal part, with the weakness of his age. He does not march with the uncertain and half-determined step of William de Lorris. His satire is as biting, his sublime as wonderful, his tragic narratives as deep and distressing, as any which the age of Pericles or of Virgil could boast. His grand poem embraces the whole compass of human invention. He has thought proper to render it the receptacle of all his animosities and aversions. No author has exhibited craft and imposture and tyranny and hard-heartedness in bolder and more glowing colours than Dante. No poet has shown himself a greater master of the terrible, of all which makes the flesh of man creep on his bones, and persuades us for the moment to regard existence, and consciousness, and the condition of human beings, with loathing and abhorrence. Dante exhibits powers, of which we did not before know that the heart of man was susceptible, and which teach us to consider our nature as

CHAP. XI. something greater and more astonishing than we had ever been accustomed to conceive it. Chaucer had the advantage of perusing the writings of Dante ; and he read them with that familiarity and interest with which we are apt to be impressed in perusing the works of a great genius, who had just gone off the stage of life at the time we entered it. Dante died seven years before Chaucer was born.

Character
of Pe-
trarca.

The great rival of Dante, in the opinion of those whom an early acquaintance with the idiom in which their works are written renders in some respects the best qualified to decide on the question, is Petrarca. He was only by twenty-four years the senior of the father of English poetry ; and there can be little doubt that his popularity and success were contemplated by Chaucer among the great incentives which urged him to tread in the same steps, and cultivate the same art. He became early distinguished among his countrymen, and the favour of the eminent and the great seemed lavished to nourish his genius and fire his ambition. One of the foremost passions in the mind of Petrarca

was an enthusiastical admiration of the writings of the ancients. Cicero and Virgil were the favourites of his juvenile studies; he prided himself in being born their countryman; and, his sentiment being kindled by the beauty of their productions, he regarded every thing which related to Rome, its ruins, its history, its heroes, even its geographical features, with that feeling which is excited in susceptible minds when they deem themselves in the presence of a divinity. Petrarca is to be regarded as the eldest among the restorers of learning; and it is to him, and to Richard de Bury, bishop of Durham and preceptor to Edward III, the contemporary and friend of Petrarca, to their zeal and indefatigable researches, that we owe the preservation of several of the choicest remains of ancient literature, which otherwise would in all probability have been lost.

Modern critics have sometimes been at a loss to discover that supereminence of talents in Petrarca, which should justify in its fullest extent the enthusiasm of his contemporaries. It was fortunate for him that he wrote so

CHAP. XI. much on the passion of love : in this respect he completely fell in with the foible and particular bias of his times. His passion for Laura is of a singular and interesting nature, nor does it appear by any means to have been feigned ; a passion wholly ethereal and refined, which lived upon a smile, and drew the transports of the blessed from an accidental word. Laura was a married lady of some rank in the city of Avignon ; Petrarca, who was in holy orders, can scarcely be regarded as aspiring to the possession of her person ; it is difficult to say that for several years they were once in each other's society. He saw her first at church ; he passed her occasionally in the streets of Avignon ; he met her, though rarely, in places of public assembly and entertainment. Yet his passion lived through the vicissitudes of twenty years. Laura was first indignant and cruel. Afterward, when graver years urged Petrarca to endeavour to shake off his weakness, she with the coquetry to be expected from a woman proud of her poet, endeavoured by insignificant favours and encouragements to retain

him in her chains. She succeeded: he re-
mained devoted to her to the hour of her death.

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Such a passion as that of Petrarca is interesting to us now. It was much more so at the period when he wrote, when this refined love, this lowly and reverential adoration of the sex, was the universal sentiment of the polished and the honourable. Petrarca wrote several other works; eclogues, panegyrics, an epic poem: these are all neglected. But his short amatory compositions, his sonnets and *canzoni*, were of universal notoriety; every one spoke of them, every one committed them to memory, as far as the language in which they were written was known; nor have they yet, after the lapse of more than four centuries, lost their hold upon the partialities of his countrymen.

Another circumstance which contributed greatly to the fame of Petrarca in his own day, is one of the circumstances which makes him less valuable to us now; the classical refinements of his taste. In the productions of the middle ages we look for a certain air of

CHAP. XI. wildness, and we are pleased when it presents itself. Natural and irregular beauties are there at home ; a certain luxuriance which has not submitted to the discipline of the pruning knife, a *naïveté* and ingenuousness which bear no mark of the strictness of modern fastidiousness and selection. The student of true taste will view many things in these reverend fathers of literature with admiration, which he would with hesitation forgive in a modern. Petrarca is not the wild and luxuriant writer which such a student would desire to find. There is in him something too much of the naked and unadorned character of the modern French writers of verse. Yet he could not attain to their correctness and purity of taste : the age in which he lived was too young for such an attainment. He abounds in false thoughts, conceits, and fancies which may be said to smell of the crucible. It is a part of the praise of Chaucer, that, while the fame of Petrarca excited him to rivalry, he was not, except in a very slight degree, the imitator of Petrarca.

Petrarca however was a man of uncommon

sensibilities ; and those sensibilities he has not CHAP. XI.
failed with considerable felicity to transfuse
into his works. He was tremblingly alive
to every impression ; and this has caused him
to express himself respecting the objects, the
qualities and the persons he disapproved, with
a moroseness and asperity which almost make
us shudder. But he did not hate and despise
with more keenness, than he was formed to
admire and to love. The history of the
great passion of his life is a sufficient proof
of this. He loved, and was loved by his
friends, with fervour and enthusiasm. And
his soul was eminently accessible to those
feelings, which the great and the beautiful
features of nature never fail to excite in a
well-constituted mind. These feelings are
perhaps still more happily expressed in his
familiar letters, than in his poetical effusions.
In a word, if we recollect the pure and ex-
quisite sensibilities of the mind of Petrarca,
and the important share he occupied in that
arduous achievement, the revival of learning,
we shall not fail to regard him as one of the

CHAP. XI. greatest ornaments, and most exalted characters, of the age in which he lived.

Petrarca
crowned
in the
capitol.

A memorable circumstance, relative to the emulation we may reasonably suppose Chaucer to have entertained of his Italian contemporary, is the crown of laurel which Petrarca received in the Capitol at Rome, on the eighth of April 1341. We have already had occasion to remark, that those who studied deeply, in these ages when the means of deep study were accessible to few, devoted themselves to their object with an ardour of which we can with difficulty frame an idea, and were received by their contemporaries with an honour and veneration unknown to the manners of modern times. Petrarca, full of his partiality for the practices of ancient Rome, had long been eager to receive the species of coronation which had there been conferred upon poetical merit; and, as his friends in general were well acquainted with his wishes, it happened that two embassies reached him on the same day in his retirement at Vacluse, tendering to him this sanction of his merits. The

first was dispatched from the senate of Rome, CHAP. XI.
and the second from the university of Paris ;
“ Rome,” to use the expression of Petrarca
on the occasion, “ the capital of the world,
the queen of cities ; and Paris, the nursing-
mother of good and ingenuous minds which
have devoted themselves to the pursuits of
learning^t.” The classical predilections of
Petrarca determined him in favour of Rome ;
and he fixed upon Robert king of Naples, the
most learned prince of the time, before whom
to pass an examination deciding on his pre-
tensions. This prince who, in the convers-
ations held with Petrarca on this occasion,
confessed to him that, “ if it were necessary
for him to part with his crown or his studies,
he should not hesitate in deciding to retain
the latter^u,” cheerfully accepted the reference.
Petrarca accordingly repaired to Naples, where
the king received him into the utmost fa-
miliarity, and seems to have conferred upon

^t De Sade, *Memoires pour la Vie de Petrarque*, T. 1, p. 434.

^u De Sade, T. 1, p. 446.

CHAP. XI. him the gift of his lasting friendship ; thence proceeding to Rome, where the honours he so eagerly panted for were conferred. It is impossible that the splendid homage thus rendered to poetry when Chaucer was thirteen years old, should not have made a very deep impression upon the writer who produced the Court of Love at the age of eighteen ^v.

^v A life of Petrarca, which, though somewhat ostentatious and arrogant, has uncommon merit and accuracy, was published by the abbé de Sade, in 3 vols, 4to, 1764-7.

CHAP. XII.

COURT OF LOVE; CHAUCER'S FIRST CONSIDERABLE POEM.—ANCIENT AND MODERN ENGLISH POETRY COMPARED.—BATTLE OF CRESSY.

SUCH is the idea of the state of poetry and refinement it is proper we should bring with us, when we proceed to the examination of Chaucer's earliest considerable production, the Court of Love. This poem treats of an imaginary scene in the nature of a vision, the poet being transported to a spot, "a^a lite beside the mounte of Citheré, or Citheron," where he finds a splendid court, or castle, in which "Citherea goddesse was and quene," and the king, "her sonne, Cupide the blind." It is difficult to pronounce whether Chaucer was the author, or only the translator of this

CHAP.
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1346.

Plan of the
poem.

Not a trans-
lation.

^a little.

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poem ; but, as it contains obvious imitations of Ovid's Art of Love, and the poem of William de Lorris, it seems the most natural construction to suppose that Chaucer, fresh from the reading of these two works, was the single medium of the imitations we perceive. Nor does he any where discover in the course of the poem that he is a translator, but speaks of himself directly as "Philogenet of Cambridge clerke," and in other respects gives the poem the air of a native work. In almost all cases where Chaucer is simply a translator, he either expressly avows himself in that character, or at least with the most perfect ingenuousness brings forward those incidental circumstances which betray the transmarine origin of his production.

A principal subject of the poem of the Court of Love is the author's first encounter with the mistress to whose service he devotes himself, which takes place at the age of eighteen, and within the walls of the imaginary castle above mentioned. It is not clear whether the mistress he speaks of is a

real or fictitious personage. He mentions her repeatedly in such terms as would lead us to regard her as unquestionably a woman. Despair who is anxious to throw discouragement upon his suit assures him,

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Thy birth and hers they be nothing ^b egal ;
ver. 1041.

and, as the poem proceeds, the lady, who at first objects to the vehemence of his addresses, and his presumption, remarking,

This he that hath this xx yere been^c here
May nat optaine ; than marvaile I that ye
Be now so bold of love to trete with me,
ver. 964.

yet afterward accepts of his service, and
“ in comferte sets his herte ^d.” This also agrees with the introductory stanzas, before he enters on the visionary part of the poem,

^b equal. ^c i. e. in the court of Love. ^d verse 138.

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XII.

1346.

where speaking in his own person he says
of the lady to whom the piece is professedly
addressed,

No termes are ^e digne unto her excellence,
So is she spronge of noble ^f stripe and high,
ver. 15.

and adds,

But my entente and al my busie cure
Is for to write this tretesse as I can,
Unto my lady, stable, true and sure,
Faithful and kind ^g sith firste that she began
Me to accept in service as her man.
ver. 36.

Yet in opposition to all this evidence it must
be observed that Chaucer, at a much later
age, speaks of himself unequivocally as a
stranger to love ^h. It is open therefore for
us to conjecture, whether Chaucer at the

^e FR. meet.

^g since.

^f LAT. *stirps*, race.

^h See Chap. XXII.

early age of eighteen did actually aspire to the hand of a young lady of superior rank, by whom his ambition was disappointed, and his early partiality to whom he afterward thought fit to treat as unnecessary to be remembered; or whether on the other hand, like Cowley, and so many other poets of a later date, finding love the prevailing topic with the votaries of the muse, he chose to pay his court to a beauty the creation of his own fancy, till a real object and a real passion should occur, to supersede the use of so frigid an artifice.

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XII.

1346.

The measure in which the poem is written is precisely that which is now considered as best adapted to English heroic poetry; and the composition is distributed into stanzas of seven lines each, the first four rhyming alternately, the fifth rhyming to the second and fourth, and the stanza then concluding with a couplet. The structure of this stanza, though not that of the verses contained in it, Chaucer is understood to have borrowed from the French or Italians.

Versifica-
tion.

The versification of the poem of the Court

CHAP.
XII.

1346.

of Love is not inferior to that of Chaucer's latest and most finished productions. The same may be said of the *Troilus* and *Creseide*, written in the same stanza, and which is probably the next of his works in the order of their composition. This is one of the indications of a mind receiving from nature a genuine vocation for poetry, that the ear is from an early age tuned to the music of verse, and that the writer stands in need of but a small portion of experience, to enable him to catch, and echo back, that which his sense of hearing spontaneously discerns, and powerfully relishes. It may well however be matter of astonishment to us, to find so exquisite a mastery of the mechanism of verse in the eldest performance on record in which the English language is made to speak poetically, and that performance composed when its author was in a state of nonage.

The stanza of seven lines, which Chaucer uses in this and many other considerable works, he is supposed to have been the first to introduce into the English language. It obtained afterward the name of *Rythm*

*royal*ⁱ, was the favourite measure of a long succession of English poets, and is particularly dear to all genuine lovers of English poetry, as having been employed by our admirable Spenser, in his two exquisite Hymns of Love and Beauty. Perhaps the circle of English poetry does not afford a more grateful harmony, particularly as applied to compositions of the length of these last mentioned.

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XII.

1346.

Nor are the natural structure and easy flow of language exhibited in the Court of Love less to be admired than the versification. For these two merits the poem may always be perused with pleasure, by every one who has in a slight degree familiarised himself with the transparent veil of antiquity spread over the piece, which can be scarcely a stumbling-block to any readers, except those whose poetical researches have never led them back further than to the times of Dryden and Pope.

ⁱ Gascoigne, apud Tyrwhit, Essay, not. 63.

CHAP.
XII.

1346.

Fable.

But, if the Court of Love in these two respects may with sufficient propriety be denominated a finished production, there are other points of view in which it manifestly exhibits the tokens of a mind juvenile and immature. The plan of the work is meagre, naked of incidents, and with little appearance of invention. The author, summoned by Mercury, visits the court of Love at mount Citheron, where, though Cupid and Venus are the rightful king and queen, they seem to appear only by their statues, and their functions are discharged by their deputies, Admetus, the well-known host of Apollo in his shepherd-state, and Alcestis his wife. Chaucer is introduced at court by Philoboné, a gentlewoman, “chambirere” to the queen, and his personal friend, where he receives a reprimand for not having earlier made his appearance, and is sworn, with a multitude of others, newcomers like himself, to obey the twenty statutes of love, which are recited. He has scarcely left the presence, when he meets with a lady, named Rosial, to whom he instantly declares himself a

suitor, and is very importunate in his addresses. The lady at first treats him with some degree of disdain, but Chaucer, deeply affected with her behaviour, immediately falls in a swoon at her feet, and she, convinced by this occurrence of the sincerity of his professions, kindly undertakes to “set his herte in ese.” This point being adjusted, she dismisses him under the guidance of Philoboné to see the wonders of the castle.

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XII.

1346.

The poem of the Court of Love is as deficient in powers of description, as in intricacy of plot or variety of incidents. Repeatedly the author attempts the descriptive style, but he produces nothing but what is at once vague and trite. Indeed it may be observed of Chaucer throughout his writings, that description and imagery are not the element of his mind. In this respect he can by no means enter the lists with Spenser. But then no author who ever existed (Shakespear alone excepted) seizes more powerfully the manners, the humours and the sentiments of mankind, or delineates them more vigorously.

Passages of
a descrip-
tive sort.

CHAP.
XII.

1346.

While Spenser is relaxed, monotonous and effeminate, Chaucer is in the highest degree manly and alive; there are no bounds to his variety; and every point which has relation to the actions of the human mind, or the modifications of man as he appears in a state of society, is treated by him with a vividness and energy, which at once command our sympathies, and extort our astonishment. All that Chaucer has done in the style of imagery and painting, and he has done much, was effected in emulation of the poets whose works he studied, and not from the bent of his own genius. But a mind so wonderful as his could not seriously engage in the pursuit of any species of excellence, though in some degree foreign to its native and original promptings, without finally attaining to considerable perfection.

Passages of
passion.

Another defect sufficiently observable in this poem is a want of power to produce terror, or to depict the constancy of resentment and repulse. Philoboné, in her first encounter with the author, reproaches him

— that he by wilful negligence

This xviii yere had kept himselfe at large,

ver. 182.

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and adds

For better were ye ben withouten barge

Amidde the se in tempest and in rayne,

Then bidin here receving wo and pain

That ordein'd is for soche as them absente

Fro lovis courte by yerés long and ^kfele.

Presently after the author adds,

Then gan I me present tofore the king,

Trembling for fere, with visage pale of hewe,

.

And at the last the king hath me behold

With sterne visage.

ver. 274.

Yet all this preparation leads to nothing ;

* SAX. many.

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Passages of
humour.

and Chaucer has no sooner made a slight excuse, throwing the blame of his absence on "Shamefastenes," than the king graciously replies, "Wel, al is pardoned."

But though, in respect of ingenuity of plot, or richness of description, the poem of the Court of Love has little to boast, it is not destitute of very eminent merits, in addition to those which have been already mentioned. The great excellence of Chaucer's genius, as has already been stated, is relative to humour and the delineation of manners, and one or two passages deserve to be cited from this poem, as an evidence how early he attained to this species of excellence. In the enumeration of the twenty statutes of love, statute the fourteenth, he says,

It longeth eke this statute for to holde,
To deme thy ladie evermore thy frende,
And thinke thy selfe in no wise a cocolde;
In every thyng she doth but as she should;
Construe the best, beleve no talés newe,
For many a lye is tolde that seem'th full true.

But thinke that she so bounteous and faire,
 Coud not be false ; imagine this ^l algate,
 And think that tongs wicked would her ^m appaire,
 Sclandering her name and worshipful estate,
 And lovers true to setten at debate ;
 And though thou seest a faute, right at thine iye,
 Excuse it ⁿ blive, and ^o glose it pretilye.

The xv statute, use to swere and stare,
 And counterfeite a ^p lesing hardely,
 To save thy ladie's honour every where,
 And put thy selfe to fighten boldely ;

.

Say as she saith, then shalt thou not be shent,
The crowe is white ; ye truly, so I ^q rede :
 And aie what thing that she the will forbede,
 Eschue all that, and give her soverainté ;
 Her appetite folowe in all degre.

ver. 408.

Among the attendants of the court of Love
 are found a band of monks, nuns and friars :

^l always.

^m impair.

ⁿ Sax. quick.

^o gloss.

^p lye.

^q judge.

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and the passage in which they are introduced may serve to illustrate, not only the talent of Chaucer for humorous composition, but also the freedom and justness of thinking on these topics, which we may fairly consider as prevailing to a considerable extent at the time, since it offered itself to the conceptions of so young a man, and since what he has said on the subject brought no stigma on its author.

This is the courte of lusty folke and glad,
And wel becom'th ther abite and arraye ;
O why be some so sory and so sadde,
Complaining thus in blak and white and gray ?
Frerés they ben and monkés in gode fay :
Alas for routh ! gret dole it is to sene,
To se them thus bewaile and sory bene !

Se how they crie and wring ther handés white,
For they so sone went to religion ;
And eke the nonnes with vail and wimple^r plight !

^r folded, wrapped.

'Ther thought that they ben in confusion.
 Alas! they sain, we fain perfeccion,
 In clothés wide, and lacke our liberté;
 'But al the sinne ^s mote on our frendés be.

For Venus wote we wold as faine as ye,
 That ben attiréd here and wel ^tbesene,
 Desiren man and love in our degre,
 Ferme and faithful, right as ywolde the quene:
 Our frendés wicke in tender youth and grene
 Ayenst our will made us religious;
 That is the cause we mourne and wailen thus.

Then saide the monkes and frerés in the tide,
 Wel may we curse our abbés and our place,
 Our statutes sharpe to sing in copés wide,
 Chastely to kepe us oute of lovés grace,
 And never to fele comforte ne solace;
 Yet suffre we the hete of lovés fire,
 And after other happely we desire.

O fortune courséd! why nowe and wherfore
 Hast thou, they said, berafte us liberté,
 Sithe nature yave us instrument in store,

^s must.^t adorned.

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And appetite to love and lovers be?
 Why mote we suffre soche adversité,
 Diane to serve, and Venus to refuse?
 Ful often v̄ sithe this matter doth us muse.

ver. 1093.

From those who are under engagements of celibacy, Chaucer proceeds to other unfortunates, attendants upon the court of Love, whose situation precludes them from the due gratification of their innocent desires, the poor, and the ill-favoured or deformed; and upon the calamity of each of these he descants with much ingenuity.

Delicacy of
sentiment.

We should be guilty of a great omission in remarking upon this poem, if we failed to advert to those particulars in it, which most prominently mark the manners of the times, as they relate to the subject of love. And here we shall find small reason to admire the refinement of the ideas then prevalent, but on the contrary much cause to prefer the sen-

v̄ times.

timents of our own age. Chaucer is not treating of loose and libidinous desires, but of a virtuous and honourable passion, and the mistress he describes is adorned with every circumstance of decency and purity his fancy could suggest to him. Yet, even in a poem formed on this plan, he introduces many lavish and indecorous suggestions, which the notions of a more polished age would not have failed to proscribe.

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One of the most curious particulars supplied to us by this poem, is the notion of the very early period at which a young man was bound to pay his homage at the court of Love. We have already seen that Chaucer apologises for his tardiness in this respect; and, however unnecessary such an apology might appear to us, the matter it seems was very differently understood by the tribunal before which he was impleaded. The king undertakes to reprimand him in a style, not a little extraordinary to be addressed to a young man of eighteen.

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What, doth this olde,
Thus ferre ^x ystope in yerés, come so late
Unto the courte ?

ver. 280.

Of the twenty statutes of Love the sixteenth is particularly vulgar and gross. And yet it is not a little remarkable that, in the first addresses paid by the author to the superhuman and celestial beauty to whom the poem is dedicated, he represents himself as expressly referring to this statute, and excusing to the sovereign of his desires his inability to come up to its requisitions.

Peroration:

The peroration of this poem is of a very singular conception and structure. The poet's mistress is represented as accepting his suit, and referring the completion of his desires to the season of May. With this species of assignation the body of the poem concludes ; and in the next stanza, which opens the

* stepped.

peroration, the author supposes the first of May to have already arrived. The birds meet in concert to celebrate the season ;

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On May-day, whan the larke began to ryse,
To matens went the lusty nightingal.

ver. 1353.

But the manner in which they express their congratulations is exceedingly foreign to our modes of thinking, and strikingly characteristic of the habits of the time when Chaucer wrote. They sing a service to the God of Love; and, that this may be done with due decorum and formality, the author has recourse to the service-book of the Roman Catholic church, and represents each bird as executing a psalm or a lesson. The nightingale sings *Domine, labia*, the eagle performs the *Venite*, the wren *Jube, Domine*, and the thrush *Te Deum Amoris*. However uncouth and extravagant this imagination of the poet may appear to us, there is a cheerfulness and animated gaiety in the execution of it, which may well strike us with wonder, and

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Copy of the
Court of
Love in-
complete.

can scarcely fail to produce in every reader a sentiment, accordant to that which prompted the writer when he penned the stanzas.

In perusing the poem of the Court of Love we are furnished with a full specimen of the very incomplete and imperfect manner in which many of the productions of this incomparable writer have been transmitted to us. The poem as we have received it consists of 1443 lines; but it is easy to perceive that, as it came from the hand of its author, it probably did not contain less than 2000. There are three visible hiatuses which occur in the course of the work; the first after verse 1092, the second after verse 1176, and the third after verse 1317. It will appear not improbable to an attentive reader, that the passage from verse 1093 to verse 1176 is not in its proper place; since, as it stands at present, this passage introduces a description of a number of real, human expectants in the court of Love, in the midst of the enumeration of the allegorical personages who form the train of the sovereign. It seems as if this passage would more properly

come in after verse 1317. But, though this transposition would help the method of the poem, it would not serve to fill up any of the chasms above remarked. The first instance interrupts a discourse which Flattery is addressing to the author ; and what immediately follows is a part of the recantation of some one who had been a recreant to the empire of Love, but who was recently struck with the dart of Cupid. The second instance breaks off with the introduction of a new groupe, and proceeds immediately to the passage respecting the monks, nuns and friars : the omission here is only of a few stanzas. The third, and most considerable chasm interrupts the enumeration of the unfortunate expectants in the court of Love, and is immediately followed by the introduction for the second time, of Rosial, the heroine, and patroness of the whole poem. The part omitted in this instance must have been of some extent, as the catalogue of expectants is left imperfect, and the dialogue between the author and his mistress appears to be far advanced, in what is contained in

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the next stanza. The poet feigns that Pity is dead, and Disdain alone now presides in the hearts of women; though by his account he had little to complain of in that respect. But, from an incidental allusion in the conclusion of the poem, it appears that Pity had risen from her tomb to prevail upon the author's mistress to be favourable to his addresses. The whole description of this scene is omitted. It should be observed, that the above detail of the chasms in the poem proceeds in part on the assumption of the propriety of the transposition here recommended.

Editions of
Chaucer.

There is nothing more ardently to be wished by the admirers of Chaucer, than that a correct and elaborate edition should be made of his works, and that some of the same exertions should be spent upon illustrating them, which have of late years been so liberally employed upon the productions of Shakespear and Milton. Mr. Tyrwhit indeed has taken much pains, and in many respects to excellent purpose, with the *Canterbury Tales*; but nothing can be more

miserable than the condition of the printed copies of the rest of our author's works. The editors have not given themselves the trouble to mark the chasms above-mentioned; and we are often tempted to believe that they were not even at the pains carefully to read over the pieces of which they had the presumption to call themselves editors. A vulgar judgment has been propagated by slothful and indolent persons, that the Canterbury Tales are the only part of the works of Chaucer worthy the attention of a modern reader; and this has contributed to the wretched state in which his works are still permitted to exist. How much truth there is in this sentiment the reader of these volumes will be enabled to determine.

Nothing can be more pernicious than the opinion, which idleness and an incurious temper alone have hitherto sufficed to maintain, that the modern writers of verse in any country are to be styled the poets of that country. This absurdity was never carried to a greater extreme than in the book entitled Johnson's Lives of the Most Eminent

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Ancient and
modern
English
poetry
compared.

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English Poets. The first poet in his series is Cowley; and, if the title of his book were properly filled up, it would stand, Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets, from the Decline of Poetry in England, to the Time of the Author. The brilliant and astonishing ages of our poetry are wholly omitted. Milton is the only author in Johnson's series, who can lay claim to a true sublimity of conception, and an inexhaustible storehouse of imagery. Pope is an elegant writer, and expresses himself with admirable neatness and compression: Dryden is a man of an ardent and giant mind, who pours out his sentiments in a fervour and tumult of eloquence, and imparts an electricity of pleasure to every reader capable of understanding his excellence. But it is not in Dryden and Pope, in their contemporaries and successors, that we are to look for the peculiar and appropriate features of poetry, for that which separates and distinguishes poetry from every other species of composition. It is Spenser, it is Shakespear, it is Fletcher, with some of their contemporaries and predecessors,

who are our genuine poets, who are the men that an Englishman of a poetical soul would gather round him, when he challenges all the world, and stands up and proudly asks where, in all the ages of literature and refinement, he is to find their competitors and their rivals?

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It is easy to perceive, and has been verified in the example of all ages and climates, that poetry has been the genuine associate of the earlier stages of literature. There is then a freshness in language admirably adapted to those emotions which poetry delights to produce. Our words are then the images of things, the representatives of visible and audible impressions: after a while, too many of our words become cold and scientific, perfectly suited to topics of reasoning, but unfitted for imagery and passion; and dealing in abstractions and generalities, instead of presenting to us afresh the impressions of sense. The attempts of the poet are boldest and most successful, when the whole field is open to him, when he must seek for models in distant ages and countries, not when the

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excellence to which he aspires is preoccupied by poets in his own language whose merits and reputation he cannot hope to equal. Criticism too, though it may make many judges, never perhaps ripened one genius. It is a deadly foe to bold and adventurous attempts, and scarcely leaves any hope of success, but to him who aspires to please us just as we have been pleased an hundred times before.

Chaucer not
obsolete in
his lan-
guage.

One circumstance which has contributed to the neglect into which the works of Chaucer have fallen is the supposition that his language is obsolete. It is not obsolete. It is not more obscure than the language of Spenser, and scarcely more than that of Shakespear. Most of the English writers, from the death of Chaucer to the times of Elizabeth, are more obscure than our poet. The English tongue underwent little alteration till the reign of that princess. Chaucer's style, in his principal works, is easy, flowing and unaffected; and such a style, whatever may have been the circumstances of the writer, can almost never be obscure.

We take ten times more pains to familiarise ourselves with the idioms of Italy and France, than would be necessary to master that of the old English writers; while this latter acquisition would be forty times more useful, since, in addition to the intrinsic merits of their works, we should cultivate the fine poetical and moral feeling annexed to the contemplation of a venerable antiquity, and since it is only by observing the progressive stages of a language, that we can become thoroughly acquainted with its genius, its characteristic features, and its resources. All that repels us in the language of Chaucer is merely superficial appearance and first impression: contemplate it only with a little perseverance, and what seemed to be deformity will in many instances be converted into beauty. A fortnight's application would be sufficient to make us feel ourselves perfectly at home with this patriarch of our poetry.

Another obstacle which has prevented the general study and reading of Chaucer, is the real or supposed defects of his versification.

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not inhar-
monious in
his versifi-
cation.

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Dryden has gone so far as to affirm that “common sense must convince the reader [of Chaucer] that equality of numbers in every verse which we call Heroic, was either not known, or not always practised, in Chaucer’s age. It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses, which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise^y.” But Dryden was a very hasty and peremptory decider; and often, in the eagerness with which he finished his works for the press, criticised works which he had not seen. A memorable instance of this is his assertion that “Shakespear was the first who invented that kind of writing, which we call blank verse^z,” whereas *Gorboduc*, and almost all our old English plays, are in this style.

The versification of Chaucer will indeed at first glance to an unprepared reader, ap-

^y Dryden’s *Fables*, Preface.

^z *Dedication to the Rival Ladies*, a Tragi-comedy.

pear sufficiently to answer Dryden's description: but a little reflection will show it to be a mistake. The defect which Dryden imputes to our author, will, at least in all his principal works, be corrected by a very obvious expedient, which comes illustrated to us by the mechanism of the French heroic verse. Languages vary, in different periods of their history, as to the fashion of their pronunciation. Many letters are pronounced at first, which afterward by a sort of tacit consent are dropped in speech. Thus it was in French. In the progress of that language, it happened that certain authors seized the national taste at a period when syllables were sounded, which since in French speaking have been lost. Hence it has happened that these popular authors fixed the national versification, that certain syllables are counted to this day in French verse which are slurred in prose, and that the pronunciation of their verse and their prose continues to differ. We had no such permanently popular authors in the remoter stages of our language. Chaucer has done nothing more in this re-

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spect than was done by the early French poets ; with this difference, that the modern writers of English have not, like the modern writers of French, continued the practice.

There is however a considerable distinction, and that evidently to the disadvantage of Chaucer. The established French versification lengthens the mute syllables under certain circumstances, but this is according to a known and invariable rule, and the eye of the reader is never puzzled to discover the scheme of harmony proposed by the author. Chaucer on the contrary preserves or sinks the sound of his syllables arbitrarily, to suit his own convenience ; the reader is frequently unable at a glance to discover his scheme of harmony, and it is extremely difficult to do justice to his versification in the act of reading his poetry aloud to an auditor. An edition of Chaucer designed for general reading, ought undoubtedly, by accents or some equivalent expedient, to mark in certain cases to the eye the manner in which the verse is to be pronounced.

It is a circumstance not unworthy of notice that the poem of the Court of Love was written in the year which witnessed the memorable battle of Cressy. The energies of the English nation, in these two memorable monuments of intellect and valour, ascended to a certain pitch of eminence at the same time. I would not be thought by any means to equal the merits of the warrior and the poet. War, in the eye of a sound moralist, is the most humiliating attitude in which human nature can exhibit itself. A thousand men murdered on a field, by other men to whom they are total strangers, for a miserable question of political speculation, by which, ninety-nine times out of an hundred, whichever party obtains the victory, no party is the gainer, is a spectacle to make us curse existence, and the human form we bear. A war, like that of Edward III, to impose, by the juggle of a college of heralds, a foreign marauder as their first magistrate, upon a nation who agree to behold his attempt with abhorrence,

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is as unjustifiable a war as the imagination can conceive.

Yet war may in some cases be necessary, and, if necessary, then just. Men must unite in society, and ought to enable themselves to defend their society against incroachments. The strength of muscle and sinew, any more than the strength of intellect or imagination, ought not to be despised, and deserves to be cultivated. But, abstracting the moral application of military prowess, it is on every supposition an energy, and, as such, is worthy of honour. The energies of Alexander and Cæsar, however we decide upon the propriety of the manner in which they were used, might, with a little variation in the employment, have generated the most essential benefits to mankind. Power is on its own account worthy of estimation. Till it is put into action, it rests indifferently between moral praise and blame. But with power great good can be effected; without it there can be nothing worthy of commendation. We do well then to be proud of the quality

of our ancestors which won the astonishing
 battles of Cressy, Poitiers, and Azincour;
 though we shall also do well to deplore the
 perverseness and guilt of its application.

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PLAGUE OF LONDON IN THE YEAR 1349.

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IT would be unpardonable in a work the principal object of which is to paint the mind of the poet, and by this means to enable the reader, as far as possible, to transport himself into the times when Chaucer lived, if we omitted to notice the great plague which prevailed in England from August 1348 to August 1349^a. It is impossible that this scene, which took place at a period of Chaucer's life when men are already mature enough to feel, and not yet hardened to the resisting, awful impressions,

^a Barnes, History of Edward III. Book II. Chap. viii. § 6, 13.

should not have produced a great effect upon him; both from the sad and serious events which it daily presented, and from the influence which a calamity of this sort has been observed to produce upon the human race, and must have produced among Chaucer's contemporaries.

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This contagion, which, in its wide and destructive progress, does not fall short of any in the records of mankind, began in Tartary in the year 1345^b, and continued in the whole for not less than seven years. After having spread through the various kingdoms of Asia, it passed into Europe, and visited in turn every country and district into which this part of the world is divided, with impartial ruin. In London certainly not fewer than one hundred thousand persons perished^c, which was perhaps the half, and perhaps a greater proportion, of the po-

History of
this phe-
nomenon.

^b Barnes, ubi supra, § 2, 3. Stow, A. D. 1349.

^c See above, Chap. I.

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pulation which the metropolis of England then had to boast. The exaggeration of the old historians has taught them to affirm that not more than the tenth person was left alive^d.

Various circumstances, calculated to give us a vivid conception of this calamity, are selected by the judicious pen of Boccaccio. "Of the lower people," says he, "and of a great part of the middling class [in Florence], the case was still more distressful than that of the rich. Influenced by hope or by poverty, multitudes of them shut themselves up in their houses, where they sickened by thousands, and, being destitute of every kind of service and aid, perished without redemption. The first indication by which their neighbours became acquainted with their fate, was the pestilential effluvia proceeding

^d Walsingham, ad ann. He states this as the general opinion, but seems himself inclined to believe that half mankind survived the calamity.

from their corpses. In such cases, the neighbours broke open the doors, dragged forth their miserable remains, and placed them upright in the streets. Whoever had passed along the city early in the morning, would have been sure to encounter this terrible spectacle on every side. As the day advanced, biers and tables were brought, and the dead bodies piled upon them. Here were seen husband and wife, brother and sister, father and child, huddled in one load, and carried off together. Frequently it happened that, as two priests with a crucifix were going to celebrate the funeral rites of one person, three or four biers crept on silently behind, and thus gained by stealth as it were for the deceased, the wretched honours of a sort of religious interment. The churchyards and cemeteries for the dead were speedily filled; after which vast trenches were dug, in which an hundred bodies were buried together. Here they were stowed, like merchandize in a ship, one upon another, with a thin stratum of earth between,

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till the trench was filled with corpses to the very brim^e.”

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Its moral ef-
fects during
the period
of its sway.

One of the effects produced by this calamity, as we are assured by the contemporary writers, was to diffuse a general spirit of religion. “All men being awakened to the quick by so dreadful an appearance of death at their elbow, piously set themselves to bewail their sins, and amend their lives; and, where they could, to frequent the sacraments: several gave all they had to the poor^f: and, which was greatly consolatory in the general sorrow, innocent children, and the majority of those who perished, rejoiced, and uttered praises to God, with their dying lips; while the wicked themselves, before they perceived any token of the pestilence upon them, so applied their minds to the virtue of penitence, that they came at last to long for death as a blessing^g.”

^e Il Decamerone, Proemio.

^f Cantacuzenus, &c. apud Barnes, § 3, 4.

^g Naclerus, Chronica, ad ann. It is to be observed how-

It is worthy of remark how different this effect of such a calamity among Christian nations, is from the effect of the same calamity among Pagans, as described by Thucydides. He says, "Each one now hastened to do the mischief of which before he was ashamed; for they saw the virtuous perish indiscriminately with the base, and the poor mounting into the places of the rich. No one attempted great and perilous achievements from the love of virtue, for they believed that they should not live to complete their undertakings: but they gave themselves up to every kind of licentiousness and indulgence, undeterred by the fear of the Gods or the judgment of men, persuaded that they should not exist long enough to suffer the retribution of their crimes ^b." We must recollect however that the piety of Chaucer's contemporaries was not less selfish than the profligacy of those of Thu-

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Compared
with the
plague of
Athens.

ever that the pious dispositions accruing on this calamity, make no part of the admirable description of Boccaccio.

^b Lib. II. cap. viii.

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cydides. They gave away only what they did not believe they should live to enjoy ; and their detachment from worldly things displayed no affinity to kindness or benevolence. “ Parents forsook their children, and wives their husbands ; physicians refused to visit the diseased, and priests to absolve the dying penitent ; great numbers perished for want of succour, and every one unkindly and cruelly abandoned the other.”

Its conse-
quences.

The plague had no sooner subsided, than another effect of a very opposite kind was produced upon the minds of men. “ It might have been imagined that their manners would be improved, and their behaviour rendered more correct, by the influence of so terrible a lesson. But no sooner was the mortality stayed, than the contrary presently appeared. Mankind finding themselves few in number, and a multitude of them having stepped unexpectedly into large possessions, belying the awful experience of the past, they gave

¹ Gio. Villani, Cronica, Lib. XII, cap. 83. Barnes, § 3.

themselves up to shameful and disorderly living. They plunged without restraint into all the vices of a pampered appetite, and spent their time in banquetings, taverns and riots. Unaccustomed splendour, and unlooked-for opulence; these were the ruin of the upstart heirs. As to the lower people; even they found themselves possessed of a superabundance of necessaries, and refused to labour at their former occupations; they fed on the rarest delicacies; they married and discarded their wives at pleasure; and clad their ignoble offspring, and the most abandoned females, in the vestments of noble matrons and honourable ladies, who had fallen victims to the calamity^{*}. They persuaded themselves that henceforth they should never need to till the earth, work, builde houses, plant vines or doe ought else that appertayned unto humane life: having, as they supposed, more store of foode and all

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^{*} Matteo Villani, Lib. I, cap. 4. Giovanni, his brother, to whose work Matteo's is a supplement, died of the plague.

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1349. other necessities left unto them then they could spende whilst they shoulde live, and believing likewise that they were nowe secure, the fury of Gods justice being past. Whereuppon God sent a great and universall famine¹; the cattle, for want of men to look to them, wandering about the fields at random, and perishing among hedges and ditches; and vast quantities of corn being lost for want of hands to gather it in^m."

Position of
Chaucer.

It has fallen to the lot of few poets to witness an event so awful, so desolating and so astonishing as this. If it be true, that to the concoction of a great mind are required, not only original stamina of a very peculiar sort, but also great and powerful impressions to call all the secret springs of the soul into act, then the plague of 1349 may well be regarded as a principal epoch in the life of Chaucer. Though he has left no documents on the subject in his works, we may be assured that

¹ Howes, Additions to Stow, p. 859.

^m Knighton, apud X Scriptores, A. D. 1348.

he saw many things at this time, and heard more, the recollection of which could never be effaced from his mind. There is something in a calamity of this sort, that irresistibly tends to remove the ordinary and plausible medium through which human affairs are viewed; that dissolves vulgar ties, and dissipates vulgar ideas; that teaches us to look through nature up to the principle of nature, and the secret power which guides the vast machine; and that is calculated to lead a great and noble mind in particular (living and surviving amidst this human desert) to recur to itself for resources, and to become conscious of its worth and its powers.

We have no information as to where Chaucer resided, or how he was employed, during this extraordinary occurrence. In this deficiency, I am inclined to fill the vacuity to my own imagination, by recollecting the situation of a great poet of a subsequent age, in the time of a similar calamity, though of much inferior magnitude. Milton, in the period of the plague of London in

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1665, retired to the village of Chalfont St.

1349. Giles in the county of Bucks, eighteen miles from the metropolis; and it was here that he brought to a conclusion his *Paradise Lost*. Chaucer, at the period of this public distress, was a young, and Milton an old man; but Chaucer perhaps, like Milton, retired to the groves, and did not cease to be a poet: he preserved a certain internal serenity and activity, while the world seemed to be perishing around him.

Institution
of the order
of the Gar-
ter.

It is worthy of remark, as a feature of the manners and politics of the fourteenth century, that the institution of the order of the Garter, one of the most splendid and sumptuous festivals of the reign of its magnificent founder, took place on the twenty-third of April 1349ⁿ, in the midst of the most desolating season of this tremendous calamity. Historians have remarked that few princes and eminent personages fell victims to this

ⁿ Statutes of Institution, apud Ashmole, Institution of the Garter, Appendix.

pestilence°. I am glad that Chaucer wrote
no poem to celebrate the memorable triumph
which thus held its stately march between
walls of funereal sadness and putrifying car-
cases.

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XIII.

1349.

In a work, the first object of which is the
history of a certain period of literature, it
seems improper to dismiss the topic of the
great plague, without reminding the reader
that this event furnished Boccaccio with the
occasion of his Decamerone. He feigns ten
persons to have retired from Florence to a
villa at no great distance to escape from the
contagion, and, when there, to have amused
themselves for ten days with relating the
tales of which his production is composed.

Decame-
rone.

° Gio. Villani, Barnes, and Stow, ubi supra.

CHAP. XIV.

CHAUCER AT OXFORD.—ORIGINAL OF THE POEM
OF TROILUS AND CRESEIDE.—SKETCH OF THE
LIFE OF BOCCACCIO.—ERA OF LOLLIUS.

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XIV.

1350.
Chaucer
studied at
both uni-
versities.

FROM Cambridge it is not improbable that Chaucer removed to Oxford. It is affirmed by Leland^a, the great English antiquary of the sixteenth century, that Chaucer was educated at this latter place; and, though Mr. Tyrwhit has rejected his authority in the point, it will perhaps be found that he did so without sufficient consideration. There are several reasons which may induce us to admit Leland's assertion.

In the first place it is not true, as stated by

^a Scriptores Britannici, cap. dv.

Mr. Tyrwhit^b, that Leland has rested “his supposition that Chaucer was educated at Oxford, upon another supposition that he was born in Oxfordshire or Berkshire.” On the contrary, Leland sets out with an unqualified averment of the place of his education, “*Isiacas scholas—diligenter—celebravit.*” He then proceeds to state with some degree of modesty his conjecture (in which he is unquestionably mistaken) as to the place of Chaucer’s birth; strengthening his idea, among various arguments, by its vicinity to the university in which he studied. “*Isiacas scholas—celebravit: id quod ut faceret, academice vicinitas quodammodo invitavit. Nam quibusdam argumentis adducor ut credam, Isiacam vel Berochensem provinciam illius natale solum fuisse.*” Nor does Leland stop at the mere unqualified assertion that Chaucer was educated at Oxford, but proceeds to mention two eminent mathematicians, John Somme and friar Nicholas Lynne (whose names oc-

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XIV.

1350.

^b Canterbury Tales, Preface, Appendix C, note b.

CHAP. cur in Chaucer's treatise of the Astrolabe^c),
 XIV.
 under whom he affirms that our poet studied.

1350.

When Mr. Tyrwhit adds that "Leland has supposed Chaucer's education at Oxford, without the shadow of a proof," he certainly assumes too high a style; and does not sufficiently observe the decorum due from an antiquary of the eighteenth century to an antiquary of the sixteenth, who lived as near again to the times and the persons of whom he professes to treat. Leland may have made many hasty and erroneous assertions; but it is impossible for us at this distance of time to pronounce, upon what proofs (known to him, but lost to us) any one of his unrefuted assertions may have been built.

But a principal reason inducing me to believe that Chaucer studied at Oxford is the following. His poem of Troilus and Creseide is on all hands admitted to be a juvenile work. It was written, as has been already remarked, previously to its author's

^c Preliminary Discourse.

connection with the court, or to his acquisition of great and elevated patronage. This poem is dedicated to Gower and Strode^d, two scholars, both, as we have reason to believe, educated at Oxford^e. How could Chaucer more naturally, at an early period of life, have become familiarly acquainted with these eminent literary characters, than by studying in the place of education of which they were members?—If these arguments drawn from the authority of Leland and of Chaucer have any force, there is an end of Mr. Tyrwhit's triumphant sneer at the biographies immediately preceding his own, the writers of which, he says, "instead of weighing the opposite accounts of Chaucer's place of education against each other, have adopted both; and tell us very gravely, that he was first at Cambridge, and afterwards removed to complete his studies at Oxford."

In addition to what has already been offered on this subject, it deserves to be remarked that

^d Troilus, Book V, ver. 1855, 6.

^e See chap. XVII.

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1350.

these removals from one university, to another which was regarded as superior, appear to have been extremely common about the time of Chaucer. Bishop Grossteste is said to have studied first at Cambridge, thence to have gone to Oxford, and finally to Paris^f. Roger Bacon is related to have studied at Oxford, and afterward at Paris^g: and the same fact is affirmed of Michael Scot the mathematician^h, and William Occam the celebrated schoolmanⁱ, as well as of innumerable others.

Troilus and
Creseide
written
at Ox-
ford.

It was probably during the period of Chaucer's residence at Oxford, or shortly after his quitting that university, that he produced one of his most considerable works, *The Boke of Troilus and Creseide*. Lydgate, in enumerating the principal productions of our author, places this first, and expressly asserts it to

^f Ricardus Monachus Bardeniensis, cap. xvi, xix, apud Anglia Sacra. Wood, Hist. Oxon. A. D. 1228.

^g Leland, Script. Brit., cap. ccxxxvi. Wood, A. D. 1292.

^h Leland, cap. ccxxxii.

ⁱ Tanner, Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica, art. Occam.

have been the performance of Chaucer's "youth ^k." Nor is it a contemptible argument in support of Lydgate's assertion, that there occurs in the work no reference to the connections in which Chaucer afterward lived at court, and that the patrons to whom it is inscribed are Gower and Strode, who were members of this university.

The poem of Troilus and Creseide is avowedly a translation, and there has arisen some enquiry and discussion as to its author, and the language in which it was composed. Chaucer in the course of the poem calls the author Lollius^l, and the language of his original Latin^m; and in this account his admirers and critics were till lately contented to acquiesce. Mr. Tyrwhit however has asserted and attempted to showⁿ that the author of his original was Boccaccio, and the lan-

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Question,
whether
translated
from a
Latin or
Italian
original
discussed.

^k Fall of Princes, Prologue, Stanza 41.

^l B. I, ver. 395, B. V. ver. 1652.

^m B. II, ver. 14.

ⁿ Canterbury Tales, Essay on the Language of Chaucer, note 62.

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XIV.

guage in which Chaucer studied it Italian.
 ——— Though Boccaccio was the contemporary of Petrarca, and lived near the times of Dante, and though these three authors have commonly and justly been classed together, as a triumvirate reflecting unprecedented honour upon the infant literature of Italy, I purposely deferred naming Boccaccio, when I was recapitulating the merits of his illustrious countrymen, that the whole consideration of Chaucer's early obligations to the Florentine novelist and poet might be brought into one view.

Character
of Boc-
caccio.

The name of Boccaccio well deserves to be regarded as one of the most honourable in the records of literature. His prose style in particular is distinguished for purity, precision, animation and elegance; and it is to him principally that we are to ascribe the wonderful achievement of giving to his native tongue that character and form, which have remained, except in a few unessential particulars, unchanged for more than four hundred years. The languages of England and France have been in a constant state of

fluctuation; and even the phraseology of CHAP.
XIV.
Shakespear, who lived two hundred and fifty years later than Boccaccio, wears in many respects the rust of antiquity. But Boccaccio is still a standard to the writers of Italian prose. Much as his country has been indebted to him, it is to be regretted that no ample and critical account of his life has yet been given to the world. The following are some of the principal particulars which are known concerning it.

Boccaccio was the natural son of an Italian merchant, and was born in the year 1313. Particulars
of his life.
He was consequently nine years younger than Petrarca, and fifteen years older than Chaucer. He was first initiated in learning in his father's native country of Tuscany. At an early age he displayed a singular aptness for literary pursuits; but his father had other views respecting him, and therefore, speedily withdrawing him from the haunts of the muses, placed him under the direction of an individual of his own class, who took young Boccaccio with him to Paris; where he was retained six years, with great violence, as he

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informs us, to the bias of his own inclinations, in the drudgery of commerce°. This perhaps was judged by the father an experiment of sufficient extent; and accordingly, after a short subsequent trial of the young man in the same pursuits immediately under his eye, he resolved to consign him to the tuition of a celebrated lawyer and professor of Florence, that he might be bred to the practice of the canon law. This however succeeded no better than the former project; the destination of the youth to literature was unconquerable; and his father seems at length to have yielded to a necessity, which he found it vain to resist.

The catalogue of Boccaccio's principal works is as follows: four historical poems, *La Teseide*; *Il Filostrato*; *L'Amorosa Visione*; and *Il Ninfale Fiesolano*: four prose romances, *Il Filocopo*; *La Fiammetta*; *L'Ameto*; and *Il Laberinto d'Amore*, otherwise called *Il Corbaccio*; four works in Latin prose, *De*

° Boccaccio, *Genealogia Deorum*, Lib. XV.

Genealogia Deorum, Libri XV; De Montium, Sylvarum, Lacuum, Fluviorum, Stagnorum & Marium Nominibus, Liber Unus; De Casibus Virorum & Fæminarum Illustrium, Libri IX; and *De Claris Mulieribus, Liber Unus*: and sixteen eclogues in Latin verse. The production upon which the present reputation of Boccaccio almost singly rests is *Il Decamerone*, a collection of one hundred tales in Italian prose. The style of this performance has, ever since it was written, been regarded as nearly a perfect model of the familiar and elegant in Italian composition, and the tales are related with great simplicity, spirit and humour. The poetry of Boccaccio is pronounced by his countrymen to be as feeble and languid in its character, as his prose is exquisite and admirable.

We cannot trace the publication of any of the works of Boccaccio further back than to the twenty-eighth year of his age. This date is ascertained by a letter of dedication to a lady, whom he calls La Fiammetta, sent with a copy of *La Teseide*, which appears to have been written at Naples, 15 April 1341. Boc-

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 caccio is usually stated by his biographers to have been dispatched by his father to Naples in that year on some commercial concerns, where, being introduced to Robert king of Naples, the most learned prince of his time, he experienced great encouragement from that monarch, and conceived a passion for Mary of Arragon, the natural daughter of the king, to whom he is supposed in several of his works to refer under the feigned appellation of La Fiammetta.

The Decamerone also admits of a date being assigned it, from this circumstance. The tales are feigned to be related through the medium of a conversation between seven gentlemen and three ladies, who retired from Florence on account of the great plague in that city in 1348. The work is represented by its author as having cost him considerable time in the composition, so that it probably was not completed till several years after the event which furnished the occasion of its production. It could not however have been written later than 1362, when Boccaccio was converted from these trivial pursuits and pro-

fane learning, by the remonstrances of a CHAP.
XIV.
monk, a stranger, who professed to be di-
vinely instigated to threaten him with speedy
death, and the torments of hell for ever, if he
did not suddenly repent of his iniquities.

Boccaccio, though the contemporary of
Petrarca, does not appear to have been per-
sonally acquainted with him till the year
1350. From that time they furnish a pleasing
and delightful example of the two most
eminent literary men of Italy, impressed with
a fervent and uninterrupted attachment for
each other. Beside being both poets, and
both sedulous and successful cultivators of
their vernacular idiom, they also sympathised
in their zeal for the restoration of ancient
learning. Latin, as we have already seen,
was a language much cultivated in these ages,
and several of the illustrious Roman writers
received a due degree of attention and ho-
mage; but the Greek tongue had been almost
extinguished in the West. Petrarca procured
himself an instructor in this language, by
name Barlaam, in the year 1339; but Barlaam

In friend-
ship with
Petrarca.

A reviver
of Greek
literature.

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shortly after died; and, when Petrarca received from Constantinople a present of a Greek Homer in 1354, though he declared himself charmed with his acquisition, he confessed that he was unable to communicate with his illustrious favourite in the tongue in which his poems were written. In 1360 Boccaccio put himself under a master in the Greek language, named Leontius Pilatus, with whom he carefully perused the Iliad and the Odyssey.

Boccaccio has left us an entertaining portrait of the preceptor under whom he studied. "His aspect," says he, "is frightful, and his features monstrous; his beard is long and hirsute, and his hair coarse and black; he is continually immersed in profound meditation, and neglectful of all the decorums of society; he is harsh, unpolished, without manners, and without civility; but he is profoundly acquainted with all the treasures of Greek literature, and is an inexhaustible storehouse of Grecian story and Grecian fable, though possessing a slight tincture only of the Latin lan-

guage^p.” This man, such as he was, Boc- CHAP.
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caccio was contented, for the love of learn-
ing, to receive and entertain for a long time
under his roof. He introduced him to
Petrarca; but Petrarca was more delicate in
his tastes, and less patient of what offended
him. Petrarca observes of Leontius, that he
was “in fact a Calabrian; but that in Italy he
called himself a Thessalonican, just as in
Greece he gave himself out for an Italian,
pleasing himself with the foolish idea, that he
should be more respected in either country,
in proportion as he was understood to be
a native of the other^q.” Boccaccio left him
with Petrarca at Venice in the year 1363, who
for some time endeavoured to detain him.
“But this *Leo* of yours,” says he in a letter
to Boccaccio, “who is in every point of view
an untamed beast, was as deaf to all my in-
treaties as the rocks he was so eager to seek.”

^p De Sade, *Memoires pour la Vie de Petrarque*, T. III, p. 625. Tiraboschi, *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, Lib. III, c. 1, §. 8.

^q Tiraboschi, *ubi supra*.

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Soon after your departure therefore he took shipping for Constantinople. Scarcely had he time to reach that place, before I received from him a letter as long and as rough as his beard, in which he curses Constantinople just as much as before he cursed Italy, and intreats me, more piteously than Peter intreated Christ on the water, to call him back hither, and show myself his saviour. But no! he shall have neither letter nor message on my part; let him stay where he is, and live miserably in the place to which he withdrew insolently^r." Leontius however, though he received no answer to his letters, could not be prevented from taking his passage to Europe, when, being overtaken by a tempest, and having clung to a mast of the vessel, a stroke of lightning reached him, and reduced him and the mast to ashes in an instant^s.

^r Tiraboschi, ubi supra.

^s Tiraboschi, ubi supra. The above particulars respecting Boccaccio are extracted from De Sade, *Memoires pour la Vie de Petrarque*; Manni, *Istoria del Decamerone*, P. I; and Tiraboschi, Lib. III, cap. 2, §. 38—45.

The question of the date of the different works of Boccaccio is by no means foreign to that of the obligations of Chaucer to his writings.

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It is thus that Mr. Tyrwhit expresses himself on the subject of the *Troilus* and *Cresseide*. “It is so little a while since the world has been informed, that the *Palamon* and *Arcite* of Chaucer was taken from the *Theseida* of Boccace, that it would not have been surprising if another century had elapsed without our knowing that our countryman had also borrowed his *Troilus* from the *Filostrato* of the same author; as the *Filostrato* is more scarce, and much less famous, even in Italy, than the *Theseida*.” Mr. Tyrwhit then proceeds to give a minute narrative respecting the manner in which he was led to discover what he calls, Chaucer’s “theft.” “The first suspicion which he entertained of it was from reading the title of the *Filostrato* at large in *Saxii Hist. Lit. Typog. Mediolan. ad an. 1498*; and he afterward found, in *Montfaucon’s Bibl. Mss. t. ii. P. 793.* among the king of France’s Mss. one with this title,

Versifies
the story
of the
loves of
Troilus.

CHAP. XIV. *‘ Philostrato, dell’ amoroze fatiche di Troilo per Gio Boccaccio.’*—He had just employed a person to procure him some account of this Ms. from Paris, when he had the good fortune to meet with a printed copy in the collection of the Reverend Mr. Crofts, and had soon an opportunity of satisfying himself, that Chaucer was to the full as much obliged to Boccace in his *Troilus* as in his *Knights Tale*’.”

In another part of his publication however Mr. Tyrwhit very reasonably remarks, that Chaucer in the course of his poem has again and again asserted that the name of the author from whom he translates is *Lollius*, and that Lydgate expressly mentions that the title of the original work was *Trophe*”. “How *Boccace* should have acquired the name of *Lollius*, and the *Filustrato* the title of *Trophe*, are points which I confess myself unable to explain*.”

^t Tyrwhit's *Cant. Tales*, Essay, n. 62.

^u *Fall of Princes*, ubi supra.

^{*} Notes on the *Canterbury Tales*, not. 7 from the end.

To any person in the least accustomed to consider the nature of evidence, and to weigh opposite proofs against each other, it can scarcely be necessary to remark upon this hypothesis of Mr. Tyrwhit, that direct evidence is of the highest class, and presumptive evidence of a class essentially inferior; and that the express statements of Chaucer and Lydgate on this point have a stronger claim upon our assent, than the conjectures of the editor of the Canterbury Tales.

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Chaucer's
poem not
founded
upon that
of Boc-
caccio.

Since Mr. Tyrwhit's publication, a modern edition of the *Filostrato*, erroneously stated in the title to be the first printed edition, has appeared at Paris, 1789, and is not difficult to be obtained; so that every one who pleases may compare the *Filostrato* with the *Troilus* and *Creseide*, and judge for himself of the degree of resemblance between them.

But, supposing these two poems to agree to the minutest particular, I should still believe that Chaucer did not translate Boccaccio. I should prefer his own assertion as to the name of his author, to this circuitous proof; nor can I conceive any reason why he should

CHAP. XIV. rather wish to be thought indebted to an
imaginary Latin author, called Lollius, than
to his illustrious Italian contemporary Boc-
caccio.

If the poem of Troilus and Creseide were written at Oxford, or soon after Chaucer quitted that university, it probably was not finished later than 1350. Boccaccio's two large Italian historical poems, the Teseide and the Filostrato, were the production of his youth. The Teseide bears date 1341, and the Filostrato is usually considered, and is affirmed by the Parisian editor^x, to be a subsequent performance. From these dates we shall perceive that it is not naturally impossible that the Troilus should be a translation of the Filostrato. But, if we consider the comparative slowness and limited nature of the literary intercourse which then subsisted between England and Italy, if we recollect that Chaucer had not yet entered into the continental connections which he afterward formed, and

^x Prefazione.

if we add that the young Boccaccio had by CHAP.
XIV.
no means acquired the brilliant fame which
he subsequently obtained, we shall think it
little probable that his juvenile essay so
speedily obtained the honours of an English
translation. There is indeed a translated
sonnet of Petrarca inserted in the *Troilus*^z;
but, though Petrarca was but nine years
older than Boccaccio, it is to be considered
that he came at a much earlier period of life
than his friend, into possession of the highest
degree of celebrity.

Mr. Tyrwhit seems inclined to consider
Lollius as the name of a man who had no
other existence than in the forgery of Chau-
cer. But this is a strange hypothesis. What
motive had Chaucer for such a forgery? The
poem of *Troilus* and *Creseide* was certainly
not written by Lollius Urbicus, a Roman his-
torian of the third century, to whom it is
thoughtlessly ascribed in Speght's and Urry's
editions^a; since it is interspersed with ideas of

^z Book I, ver. 401.

^a List of authors cited by Chaucer.

CHAP. XIV. chivalry, which did not exist till long after
that period: and Mr. Tyrwhit perhaps had never heard of any other Lollius. It is surely however too hasty a conclusion, because his name has not reached us from any other quarter, to say that he never existed. How many authors, with their memories, even to their very names, may we reasonably suppose to have been lost in the darkness of the middle ages! Not to travel out of the present subject for an illustration, if the *Filostrato*, a considerable poem of so celebrated an author as Boccaccio, had so nearly perished, who will wonder that the original work, and the name of the author from whom Boccaccio translated it, have now sunk into total oblivion?

There is a further very strong evidence of the real existence of Lollius, which occurs in the writings of Chaucer. One of our poet's most considerable works is entitled the *House of Fame*; and in this poem, among a cluster of worthies, he introduces the writers who had recorded the story of Troy. They are as follow; Homer, Dares, Titus [or Dictys],

Lollius, Guido dalla Colonna, and Geoffrey CHAP.
XIV.
of Monmouth ^m.

Boccaccio is known to have been frequently a translator. Very many of the tales in the Decamerone, that of Grisildis for example, to which we shall soon have occasion to refer, existed before his time ⁿ. He assures us himself that he translated the Teseide from a Latin original ^o. Is it not more than probable that the Filostrato came from the same source? Is it not obvious to imagine that Chaucer and Boccaccio copied from one original? Translation was peculiarly the employment of the first revivers of learning; nor did they hold it otherwise than in the highest degree honourable, to open to their unlearned countrymen the sacred fountains of knowledge which had so long been consigned to obscurity and neglect.

After all however the Troilus is by no means the exact counterpart of the Filos-

^m House of Fame, B. III, ver. 374—382.

ⁿ Opera Petrarchi, apud Tyrwhit, Introd. §, 20.

^o Teseide, Lettera alla Fiammetta.

CHAP.
XIV.

trato. To omit minuter differences, the Filostrato is divided into ten books, and the Troilus into only five. Add to which, the Troilus, which consists of about eight thousand lines, contains three thousand more than the Filostrato. Chaucer is supposed by Tyrwhit and Warton^p, to have taken his Knight's Tale from the Teseide of Boccaccio. What has he done in this case? Most materially abridged his original. The Teseide is a poem of about ten thousand lines, and Chaucer has told the same story in little more than two thousand. It is not improbable indeed, as a poem of Palamon and Arcite the heroes of the Teseide was one of Chaucer's early productions, that he first translated the Teseide, and afterward compressed it as we find it in the Canterbury Tales. Abridgment is infinitely a more natural operation in such cases than paraphrase. When a man of taste, divested of the partialities of a parent, surveys critically a poem of length, one of the

^p Tyrwhit, Introd. Warton, Hist. Eng. Poet. Sect. XII.

things most likely to strike him is that the poem contains superfluities which, with advantage to the general effect, might be lopped away. These considerations, even independently of the direct evidence of Chaucer and Lydgate, would induce an accurate impartial observer to adopt the hypothesis here maintained that Chaucer in his *Troilus* went to Boccaccio's original, and not to Boccaccio, for the materials upon which he worked.

Mr. Tyrwhit observes that, all things considered, "it would not have been surprising if another century had elapsed without our knowing that our countryman had borrowed his *Troilus* from the *Filostrato* of Boccace." After what has been offered, the reader may perhaps be of opinion, that the world might have submitted to the want of this knowledge for a century longer, without suffering any material detriment.

Lollius, of whom it seems absurd to dispute the existence, or to confound him as an author with the great Florentine novelist, may with some degree of probability be assigned to the twelfth century, and considered

CHAP.
XIV.
Age in which Lollius flourished.

CHAP. as the contemporary of Wace and Thomas of
XIV. Becket. This was the period of the first great struggle of the human mind, to shake off the darkness and sleep in which it had been shrouded for ages. The "tale of Troy divine"⁹, was one of those which forcibly engaged the attention of the revivers of a purer Latinity; and it was about this period that individuals in different countries of Europe were seized with the mania of deducing their respective nations from a Trojan original. The Greek language was then almost unknown in the West; the fountains of wisdom and poetry in Homer were shut; and the men of that age found a substitute as they could in the books of Dares Phrygius and Dictys Cretensis, two pretended eyewitnesses of the war they undertook to describe, whose spurious narratives are supposed to have been written under the emperors Nero and Constantine. These authors, partial to the besieged as Homer is to the

⁹ Milton, *Il Penseroso*.

assailants, were at this time particularly studied CHAP.
XIV.
and cherished; and one of the most elegant
Latin writers of the twelfth century, Joseph
of Exeter, produced an heroic poem in six
books upon the Trojan war, founded upon
the materials they furnished, which has some-
times been appended to the Delphin edition
of the authors themselves. There is a pro-
pensity in human affairs to ripen minds of
nearly the same class and character in dif-
ferent places at the same time: why may we
not then with sufficient plausibility regard
Lollius, in Italy, or of whatever other coun-
try he was a native, as labouring upon his
Trophe, about the very period at which our
Joseph of Exeter produced his *De Bello Tro-
jano*; more fortunate in one respect than his
British rival, that though Lollius's work has
been lost and the other's preserved, the con-
ceptions of Lollius have been repeated and
immortalised by the pens of Boccaccio and
Chaucer, of Shakespear and Dryden, while
the *De Bello Trojano* slumbers secure and un-
disturbed in the collections of the curious?

CHAP. XV.

TROILUS AND CRESEIDE, A POEM IN FIVE BOOKS.

CHAP.
XVPlan of the
translation.

CHAUCER gives the following account of the manner in which he has conducted his version of Lollius's production, which, though it implies that he did not confine himself to his original with a scrupulous fidelity, yet does not lead us to suppose that he varied from it in any very essential particular.

But ^a soth is, though I cannot tellen all,
 As can mine auctour of his excellence,
 Yet have I saied, and God ^b to forné shall
 In every thing all wholly his sentence ;
 And if that I, at lovés reverence,
 Have any worde in ^c eched for the best,
 Doeth therewithal right as your selven lest.

^a sooth, truth.^b going before, helping.^c added.

For all my wordés here, and every part,
 I speake hem all under correction
 Of you that feling have in lovés art,
 And put it all in your discrecion.

CHAP.
 XV.

Book III, ver. 1330.

The poem of Troilus and Creseide is divided into five books. The plan of the work proceeds on the assumption, in direct opposition to the narrative of Homer, that Calchas, the great soothsayer of the Grecian army, is a native of Troy, who, being instructed by his skill in divination that the city in which he lived will finally fall a victim to the prowess of the besiegers, prudently takes a resolution of withdrawing himself in secret, and going over to the enemy. This he does in so cautious a manner, that he leaves his only daughter, Creseide, behind him, exposed to all the resentment of his exasperated countrymen. Creseide, terrified at a danger of which she had not had the smallest foresight, repairs to Hector, and intreats his protection, who, with the goodness and nobleness of nature congenial to him, undertakes for her safety. Thus secured, she conducts

Story of the
 poem.

CHAP. herself in all respects with the utmost discre-
 XV.
 tion and propriety.

Book I.

A festival soon after occurs, in the month of April, in honour of the Palladion, when a general procession is made to the temple of Minerva, and Creseide among the ladies of Troy is introduced as a worshipper. Her appearance and carriage on this occasion are touched by Chaucer with great beauty and delicacy.

Among these other folke was Creseida,
 In widdowes habite blake : but ^d natheles,
 Right as our first letter is now an A,
 In beauté first so stode she ^e makeles ;
 Her godely loking gladded all the ^f prees ;
^g N'as never sene thing to be prais'd so derre,
 Nor under cloudé blake so bright a sterre,

^d nevertheless.

^e without a peer : she was the first in beauty among the dames of Troy, as much beyond a question, as A is unquestionably the first letter in the alphabet.

^f press, multitude.

^g was not ; or rather was : Chaucer uses the double negative, inserted before and after the verb, conformably to the idiom of the French language.

As was Creseide, thei saiden ^heverichone
 That her behelden in her blaké wede;
 And yet she stode ful lowe and stil alone
 Behinden other folke in litel ⁱbrede,
 And nie the doré under shamés drede,
 Simple' of atire, and ^kdebonaire of chere,
 With ful assured loking and manere.

ver. 169.

It is here that she is unexpectedly seen by Troilus, who immediately becomes enamoured of her. His frank and unconquered heart is described with great spirit.

This Troilus, as he was wont to gide
 His yongé knightés, ladde hem up and doune
 In thilké largé temple' on every side,
 Beholding aie the ladies of the touné,
 Now here, now there; for no devociouné
 Had he to none, to ^lreven him his rest,
 But gan to praise and ^mlacken whom he lest.

And in his walke ful faste he gan to waiten,
 If knight or squier of his companie

^h every one. ⁱ breadth: *in litel brede*, not conspicuous.
^k gentle, courteous. ^l bereave, deprive of. ^m blame.

CHAP.
XV.

Gan for to ⁿsike, or let his eyen ^obaiten
On any woman that he coude espie;
Then he would smile, and holde it a folie,
And say hem thus: O Lorde, she slepeth softe
For love of the, whan thou turnest ful ofte.

I have herde tel ^ppardieux of your living,
Ye lovers, and eke your leude observaunces,
And ^awhiche a labour folke have in winning
Of love, and in the keping ^awhiche dout-
aunces,
And whan your pray is loste, wo and pe-
naunces:
O very folés! blinde and nice be ye,
There is not one can ware by other be!

ver. 183.

The following stanzas bring back to us
with advantage the figure of Creseide.

She n'as nat with the ^rleste of her stature,
But al her limmés so wel answering
Weren to womanhode, that créature
Was never ^slassé mannishe in seming;

ⁿ sigh. ^o bait, pause. ^p by God. ^a what.
^r least: she was by no means small. ^s less.

And eke the puré wise of her mening
 She shewed wel, that men might in her gesse
 Honour, estate, and womanly noblesse.

'Tho Troilus right wonder wel withal
 Gan for to like her mening and her chere,
 Whiche ^u somedele ^w deignous was, for she
 let fal

Her loke a ^xlite aside, in suche manere
 Ascaunces, What may I nat stonden here?
 And after that her loking gan she light,
 That never thought him sene so gode a sight.

ver. 281.

These lines beautifully express the struggle
 of the mind of the lover, as he first gazed
 with conscious passion upon the person of
 his mistress.

Therwith his herte began to sprede and rise;
 And soft he sighéd, lest men might him here,
 And caught ^y ayen his former playing chere.

ver. 278.

^t Then. ^u somewhat. ^w disdainful. ^x little.
^y again.

CHAP.
XV.

From the temple Troilus retires to his own chamber, where he is visited by Pandarus, the uncle of Creseide, a convenient ally, and so devoted to the hero of the poem, as voluntarily to apply himself to the seduction of his niece, to insure the tranquillity and peace of heart of his friend. Pandarus, not without difficulty, extorts from Troilus the secret of his love, and undertakes his cause. The first book concludes with an admirable picture of the manners and temper of Troilus, after his cares had thus been relieved by the prompt kindness of his auxiliary. Pandarus finds him thrown in a disconsolate attitude upon his bed ; but, when he takes his leave,

Dan Troilus lay ^z tho no lenger doun,
But up anon upon his stedé baie,
And in the felde he played the lioun ;
Wo was that Greke, that with him met that
daie ;
And in the toun his maner ^a tho forthe aie

^z then.

^a thenceforth.

So godely was and gat him so in grace,
That eche him lov'd, that loked in his face.

CHAP.
XV.

For he becamen the frendliest wight,
The gentilest, and eke the mosté fre,
The trustiest, and one the besté knight,
That in his time was, or els mighté be:
Dede were his ^bjapés, and his cruelté,
Dede his high porte, and al his maner straunge,
And eche of hem gan for a vertue chaunge.

ver. 1073.

The second book contains the blandish- Book II.
ments of Pandarus to Creseide, which are
conducted with great skill, as being addressed
to a young lady of the utmost decorum and
bashfulness. Immediately after this, the au-
thor has very happily imagined the return of
Troilus from a successful sally against the
besiegers, his progress necessarily leading
him under the window of his mistress.

His helme ^cto-hewen was in twentie places,
That by a ^dtissue hong his backe behinde ;

^b gibes.

^c much hewn.

^d string.

CHAP.
XV.

His shelde ^eto-dash'd with swerdés and with
maces,

In whiche men might many an arowe finde,
That 'thirled had bothe horne, and nerfe,
and rinde;

And aie the peple cry'd, Here com'th our joie,
And, next his brother, holder up of Troie!

ver. 638.

The appearance of Troilus on this occasion operates strongly to fix the budding and irresolute partiality of Creseide; and, the more speedily to bring the affair to its desired issue, Pandarus contrives a meeting of the lovers, and several eminent personages, at a dinner to be given by Deiphobus, another son of Priam.

Book III.

When the day of this dinner arrives, Troilus, who, feigning himself sick, had gone to his brother's house the night before, remains in his apartment, where he is visited by the principal persons of the company, and last of all by Creseide. Pandarus, who had ex-

^e much bruised.

^f pierced.

aggerated to her the obloquy and animosity CHAP.
XV.
to which she was exposed by the treason of
her father, and prevailed upon her to sue to
the rest of the company for their protection,
makes use of this pretence to leave her alone
with her lover, that she might with the better
advantage importune him for his patronage
and friendship. This is their first interview.
Other meetings succeed ; but they are short,
unfrequent and cautious, so as rather to ge-
nerate an uneasiness and craving of the mind,
than to produce satisfaction. The convers-
ation that passed was little.

But thilké little that thei spake or wrought,
His wisé ^s ghoste toke aie of all soche hede,
It seemed her he wisté what she thought
Withouten worde ; so that it was no nede
To bid him aught to do'n, or aught forbede ;
For which she thought that love, al come it
late,
Of allé joie had open'd her the ^h yate.

ver. 463.

^s spirit : *wise ghoste*, penetrating spirit. ^h gate.

CHAP.
XV. Pandarus in the mean time resolved that their mutual love should be brought to its full consummation. For this purpose,

Right sone upon the chaunging of the mone,
When lightlesse is the world a night or
twaine,

And that the welkin ⁱshope him for to raine,
He streight^k a morowe unto his nece wente.

.

And finally he swore, and gan her saie
By this and that, she should him not escape,
Ne lenger ⁱdone him after her to ^mcape,
But certainly she musté by her leve,
Come soupen in his house with him at eve.

.

Or ellis softe he swore her in her ere,
He ⁿn'oldé never comen there she were.

ver. 550.

Creseide yields to the urgent importunity of her uncle, and every thing happens as he had projected. The incidental occurrences of the

ⁱ shaped, prepared. ^k in the morning. ⁱ cause.

^m caper, dance. ⁿ would not

evening are described with much life and nature. After staying a proper time at Pandarus's house, Creseide takes leave, and prepares to depart ; but fortune intercepts her intention. CHAP.
XV.

The benté moné with her hornés pale,
Saturn and Jove, in Cancro joyned were,
That suche a raine from heven gan °availe,
That every maner woman that was there
Had of that smoky raine a very fere.

ver. 625.

Creseide is prevailed upon to take up her abode for that night in her uncle's house.

Thus al is wel ; but ^p tho began aright
The newé joie, and al the feste againe ;
But Pandarus, if ^a godely had he might,
He would have hiéd her to beddé faine,
And said, O lorde, this is an hugé raine,
This were a wether for to slepen in.

ver. 653.

Pandarus conducts his niece to rest in a small

° descend.

^p then.

^a decently he had been able.

CHAP.
XV.

apartment by herself, and accommodates her female attendants in a more spacious anti-chamber, with an open door leading to the apartment of Creseide. At the same time he places Troilus upon a secret stair, conducting by the other side to the lady's bed-chamber. Affairs being in this position,

The sterné winde so loude began to route,
That no wight other's noisé might yhere,
And thei that laien at the dore without
Ful ^r sikerly thei slepten al ^s yfere ;
And Pandarus, with a ful sobre chere,
Goth to the dore anon withouten lette
There as thei lay, and softély it shette.

ver. 744.

He then approaches the bedside of Creseide, and, having roused her, communicates to her the story, that Troilus has just arrived, through all the rain, in a fit of frantic jealousy ; that he has heard, from what he conceives good authority, that she has bestowed

^r securely.

^s together.

her utmost favours upon a rival pretender ; CHAP.
XV.
and that he is driven by the intelligence to ungovernable desperation. Creseide assures her uncle of her constancy and honour, and proposes to see Troilus, and satisfy his scruples, early the next morning. Pandarus exclaims upon the futility of this project, and asserts that it will be impossible otherwise than by an immediate interview, to prevent Troilus from laying violent hands upon himself. Nothing can be better imagined than this preparation. Troilus is then introduced, and his mistress expostulates with him upon the unworthiness of his accusation, in a style of such ingenuousness and feeling, that struck with remorse and self-abhorrence, he falls into a swoon. By the efforts of Pandarus and Creseide he is recovered ; and Pandarus, retired to a distance from the lovers, pretends to sleep. The consequence of this situation is easily imagined. The triumph of the lover is complete. Nothing can be more beautiful than the simile in the latter of the two following stanzas.

CHAP.
XV.

Creseide all ^t quite from every drede and
tene,

As she that justé cause had him to ^u trist,
Made him soche feste it joie was for to sene,
Whan she his trouth and clene ententé wist;
And, as about a tre with many a twist
^w Bitrent and writhen is the swete wodbinde,
Gan eche of hem in armés other winde:

And as the newe abashed nightingale,
That stinteth first, whan she beginneth sing,
Whan that she hereth any herdés tale,
Or in the hedges any wight sterring,
And after ^x siker doeth her voice out ring;
Right so Creseidé, whan her dredé ^y stent,
Open'd her hert, and told him her entent.

ver. 1231.

Such was the first confident and unreserved
meeting of the lovers: the third book con-
cludes with a description of their entire hap-
piness and content.

^t quit, relieved.

^u trust.

^w twined.

^x secure.

^y stinted, ceased.

The fourth book treats of their separation. C H A P.
XV.
Calchas, the father of Creseide, is exceedingly desirous of having his daughter restored to him ; and, a skirmish having been fought in which several Trojans of distinction were made prisoners, he takes advantage of this circumstance to propose an exchange. The overture is accordingly made, and the delivery of Creseide for Antenor is voted in the council of Priam, or, as Chaucer terms it, the Trojan “ parliment.” Book IV.

The farewell visit of the ladies of Troy to Creseide is described with considerable vivacity and humour.

² Quod first that one, I am glad truély
Because of you, that shal your father se ;
Another saied, Ywis so am not I,
For all to little hath she with us be ;

² Quod ^a tho the thirde, I hope ywis that
she
Shall bringen us the pece on every side,
That, when she goth, almightie God her
gide.

² Quoth.

^a then.

CHAP.
XV.

And busilie thei gonnen her comforten
On thing, God wot, on which she little
thought,
And with ^bher talés ^cwenden her disporten,
And to be glad thei ofté her besought.

.
^dTho wordés and ^dtho womannishé thingés,
She herd hem right as tho she ^ethennés were ;
For, God it wote, her herte on other thing is,
Although the body sat emong hem there.

.
So that she felte almoste her herté die
For wo, and werie of that companie.

ver. 687.

After so solemn a decree on the fate of
Creseide, there is no longer any remedy ;
and, in the interview which takes place be-
tween the lovers on this occasion, Creseide
is so affected with her misfortune, that she
falls into a swoon.

She was right soche to sene in her visage,
As is that wight that men on ^fbere ybinde ;

^b their.

^c weened, thought, purposed.

^d Those.

^e thence, in another place.

^f bier.

Her face, like of paradis the image,
 Was al ychaunged in another kinde;
 The plaie, the laughter, men wer wont to
 finde
 In her, and eke her joiés everichone,
 Ben fledde:—

ver. 862.

Troilus, imagining her to be dead, determines not to survive her, and vents his anguish in these spirited apostrophes:

Than said he thus, ^s fulfild of high disdaine,
 O cruel Jove, and thou fortune adverse,
 This al and ^h some is, falsely have ye slaine
 Creseide, and sith ye may do me no werse,
 Fie on your might and werkés so diverse!
 Thus cowardely ye shul me never ⁱ winne;
 There shal no deth me fro my lady ^k twinne.

And thou, cité, in which I live in wo,
 And thou Priam, and brethren al ^l yfere,
 And thou my mother, farewell, for I go!
 And, Attropos, make redy thou my bere!
 And thou Creseide, o sweté herté dere,

^s fraught with, impelled by. ^h forte sum. ⁱ conquer.

^k separate. ^l together.

CHAP.
XV.

Recevé now my spirite,——would he sey,
With swerde at hert, al redy for to dey.

ver. 1191.

The farewell speech of Creseide is stamped with that decorum and dignity, which had hitherto appeared in all her actions.

For ^m trusteth wel, that your estate roiall,
Ne veine delite, nor onely worthinesse
Of you in werre, or ⁿ turnaie marciall,
Ne pompe, arraie, nobley, or eke richesse,
Ne maden me to rue on your distresse;
But morall vertue, grounded upon trouth;
That was the cause I first had on you ^o routh.

Eke gentle hert, and manhode that ye had,
And that ye had, as me thought, in dispite
Every thing that ^p sowned into bad,
As rudénesse, and ^q peplishe appetite,
And that your reson bridled your delite:
This made, aboven every créature,
That I was yours, and shal while I maie dure.

^m trust: this was the termination of the imperative mood in the time of Chaucer.

ⁿ tournament. ^o ruth, pity. ^p sounded (inclined)
toward. ^q vulgar, gross.

And this may length of yerés nat fordo,
Ne ^r remuable fortuné deface.

CHAP.
XV.

ver. 1667.

In conclusion, it is determined between them to meet again at the end of ten days; and Creseide undertakes for that purpose that she will either through pretext or stealth contrive at that time to visit the city of Troy.

The fifth and last book of the poem has for its principal topic the inconstancy of Creseide. The poet has touched but slightly upon the arts of Diomed, her seducer; but has applied his utmost force to paint in glowing colours the sentiments of Troilus, whom he holds up as the model of a true, a constant and a loyal lover. Nor has he by any means been unhappy in his execution. Troilus, the youngest of the sons of Priam and Hecuba, the favourite of the writers of the middle ages, an accomplished, undaunted and resistless hero, and, next to Hector, the chief hope of Troy, by no means degenerates into a whining shep-

Book V.

^r unstable.

CHAP. XV. herd. It is thus that he is introduced expressing himself, immediately after the departure of Creseide.

Who seeth you now, my righté ^s lodésterre?
 Who sitteth now or ^t stant in your presence?
 Who can comforten now your hertés ^u werre?
 Now I am gon, whom ^v yeve ye audience?
 Who speketh for me right now in absence?
 Alas! no wight, and that is al my care;
 For wel wote I, as ill as I ye fare.

And whan he ^w fill in any slomberings,
 Anon begin he shouldé for to grone,
 And dremen of the dredfullesté things
 That mighté ben, as ^x mete he were alone
 In place horrible, making aie his mone,
 Or ^x meten that he was emongés all
 His enemies, and in ^y her hondés fall.

And therewithal his bodie shouldé sterte,
 And with the sterte all sodainly awake,
 And soche a tremour fele about his herte,

^s load-star, north star. ^t standeth. ^u war. ^v give.
^w fell. ^x dreamed. ^y their.

That of the fere his bodie shoulde quake,
 And therewithal he shoulde a noisé make,
 And seme as though he shoulde fallen depe
 From high aloft: and than he wouldé wepe,

CHAP.
 XV.

And rewen on him selfe so pitously,
 That wonder was to here his fantasie;
 Another time he shoulde mightily
 Comfort him selfe, and sain it was folie,
 So causélesse soche drede and wo to^z drie;
 And^a eft begin his^b aspre sorowes newe,
 That every man might on his painés rewe.

ver. 232.

In this distress of mind Pandarus undertakes to comfort him; and finding him singularly oppressed with the gloomy presentiments excited in him by his dreams, exclaims

Alas! alas! so noble a creture
 As is a man, should dreden soche^c ordure!

ver. 384.

The sensations of Troilus in visiting the different parts of the city, are beautifully expressed. He intreats Pandarus, early the

^z suffer.

^a after.

^b sharp.

^c trash.

CHAP. next morning after the departure of Creseide,
 XV.
 == to accompany him in a visit to her palace.

For sens we yet maie have no moré fest,
 So let us sene her paleis at the lest.

And therwithall, his ^d meiné for to ^e blend,
 A cause he fonde into the toun to go,
 And to Creseidés housé thei gon ^f wend :
 But lorde ! this ^g sely Troilus was wo,
 Him thought his sorrowful herte ^h brast
 atwo ;

For when he saw her dorés ⁱ sperred all,
 Wel nigh for sorrow' adoun he gan to fall.

Therwith when he ^k was ware, and gan be-
 hold

How shet was every window of the place,
 As frost him thought his herté gan to cold ;
 For whiche with chaunged dedly palé face
 Withouten worde he ^l forthby gan to pace,
 And as God would, he gan so fasté ride,
 That no wight of his countenaunce ^m aspide.

ver. 524.

^d attendants.

^e blind.

^f turn.

^g simple.

^h burst.

ⁱ bolted.

^k had recollected himself.

^l forward.

^m espied.

Fro thennesforth he rideth up and doune,
And every thing came him to remembraunce,
As he rode forth by the' places of the tounne,
In whiche he ^a whilom had all his plesaunce :
Lo, yonder saw I mine owne lady daunce ;
And in that temple with her eyen clere
Me caughté first my righté lady dere ;

And yonder have I herde ful lustily
My deré herté laugh ; and yonder plaie
Saw I her onés eke ful blisfully ;
And yonder onés to me gan she saie,
Now, godé swete, loveth me wel, I praie ;
And yonde so godely gan she me beholde,
That to the deth mine hert is to her
holde ;

And at the corner in the yonder house
Herde I mine ^o alderlevest lady dere
So womanly, with voice melodiousse,
Singen so wel, so godely, and so clere,
That in my soulé yet me think'th I here
The blisful ^p sowne ; and in that yonder place
My lady first me toke unto her grace.

ver. 561.

^a formerly.

^o most dear.

^p sound.

CHAP.
XV.

And after this he to the ^ayatés wente,
 Ther as Creseide out rode, a ful gode paas,
 And up and down there made he many a
^rwente,

And to him selfe ful oft he said, Alas,
 Fro hennes rode my blisse and my solas;
 As wouldé blisful God now for his joie
 I might her sene ayen comen to Troie!

And to the yonder hil I gan her gide,
 Alas, and there I toke of her my leve;
 And yond I sawe her to her father ride,
 For sorow' of whiche mine herté shal ^sto
 cleve;

And hither home I came whan it was eve;
 And here I dwel, out casté from all joie,
 And shal, til I maie sene her ^teste in Troie.

ver. 603.

Upon the wallés fast eke would he walke,
 And on the Grekés host he wouldé se,
 And to him selfe right thus he wouldé
 talke:

Lo, yonder is mine owné lady' fre,
 Or ellés yonder there the tentés be,

^a gates.

^r turn.

^s utterly cleave.

^t again.

And thens cometh this ayre that is so ^u sote,
That in my soule I fele it doth me ^v bote.

CHAP.
XV.

ver. 666.

At length the tenth day arrives, the day appointed by Creseide to see her beloved Troilus. Troilus scarcely slept on the preceding night; and no sooner did the first beams of the sun ~~appear~~ above the horizon, than, accompanied by the friendly Pandarus, he had already taken his station on the walls to watch her approach.

Till it was ^w none, they stoden for to se
Who that there came, and every ^x maner
wight

That came fro ferre, thei saiden it was she,
Til that they coulden knowen him aright;
Now was his herté dull, now was it light.

.

To Pandarus this Troilus, ^y tho seide,
For aught I wot before ^z none ^a sikerly
Into this toune ne cometh not Creseide;

^u sweet. ^y profit, good. ^w noon. ^x sort of person.
^y then. ^z noon. ^a certainly.

CHAP.
XV.

She hath inough to doén hardély
 To ^btwinnen from her father, so trowe I,
 Her oldé father wol yet make her dine,
 Er that she go.—

Pandare answerd, It maie wel ben certain ;
 And ^cforthy let us dine, I the beseche ;
 And after ^znone than maist thou come again :
 And home thei go, withouten moré speche.

The day goth fast, and after that came eve,
 And yet came nat to Troilus Creseide :
 He loketh forth by hedge, by tre, by ^dgreve,
 And ferre his hedde over the wal he leide ;
 And at the last he tourned him, and seide,
 By God I wote her mening now, Pandare,
 Almost iwis all ^enewé was my care.

Now doubtélesse this lady ^fcan her gode,
 I wote she cometh riding privily ;
 I commenden her wisdomé ^gby mine hode ;
 She wol nat maken peple nicély
^hGaure on her whan she com'th, but softély

^b separate. ^c therefore. ^d grove. ^e thoughtless,
 inexperienced. ^f judges rightly, is discreet. ^g by my
 hood ; a trivial oath. ^h stare.

By night into the toun she thinketh ride,
 And, dere brother! thinke nat long to abide; CHAP.
XV.

We have naught ellés for to doen iwis;
 And,—Pandarus, now wilt thou ⁱtrowen me,
 Have here my trouth, I se her, yond she is,
 Heve up thine eyen, man; maiest thou nat
 se?

Pandare answeréd, Naie, so mote I ^k the,
 Al wrong, by God: what saist thou, man?
 wher art?

That I se yonde afarre n'is but a carte.

Alas, thou saiest right sothe, quod Troilus;
 But hardély it is not all for nought
 That in mine herte I now rejoicé thus;
 It is ayenst some gode; I have a thought——
 'N'ot I nat how, but sens that I was ^mwrought,
 Ne felt I soche a comfort, dare I saie,
 She com'th to-night, my life that durst I laie.
ver. 1114.

The last of these stanzas obviously supplied
 Shakespear with the hint of one of his most
 poetical passages, the beautiful lines in which

ⁱ believe.

^x prosper.

¹ Ne wot.

^m made.

CHAP. XV. Romeo expresses his unusual gaiety just before he receives the intelligence of Juliet's death.

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at
hand :

My bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne ;
And, all this day, an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful
thoughts.

ACT V.

The night however advances ; the chance
of seeing Creseide to-day is lost ; and Troilus
and his friend are obliged to return home.
The lover in the mean time flatters himself ;

But nathelesse he gladded him in this,
He thought he misacompted had his daie.

ver. 1183.

A fourth, a fifth, and a sixth day pass by,
after the tenth which had been fixed for their
interview, and yet he sees and hears nothing
of Creseide. When he is no longer able to
feed himself with hopes, he sinks into the

S H H

profoundest melancholy. He is so altered, CHAP.
XV.
that it becomes difficult for his nearest friends
to know him: he is so pale, feeble and wan,
that he can no longer walk without a crutch.
Priam however, his mother, his brothers and
sisters, all endeavour in vain to extort from
him the secret of his uneasiness. He will
confess nothing, but that he feels a grievous
malady about his heart, and is anxious to
die. He has a dream, which his sister Cas-
sandra interprets to him as emblematical of
the guilty familiarity of Diomed and Cre-
seide; but he refuses to trust her prophetic
skill. At length the fact is confirmed to him
in such a manner as no longer to admit of a
doubt. In one of the sallies of the Trojans
during the siege, Deiphobus disarms Diomed,
and strips him of the coat of mail with which
he was accoutered: Troilus examines the tro-
phy, and finds within it, just above the seat
of the heart, the very jewel which he had
presented to Creseide on the eve of her de-
parture. He now becomes careless of life;
he engages in the most desperate actions, and

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at length receives his death from the hand of
Achilles.

The Troilus
not an epic
Poem.

From this analysis of the poem, it is not difficult to infer the degree of applause to which its author is entitled. It has already been observed by one of the critics upon English poetryⁿ, that it is "almost as long as the Æneid." Considered in this point of view, the Troilus and Creseide will not ap-

Epic poetry
delineated.

pear to advantage. It is not an epic poem. It is not that species of composition which Milton^o so admirably describes, as "the most consummat act of its authour's fidelity and ripeness;" the fruit of "years and industry;" the reservoir into which are poured the results of "all his considerat diligence, all his midnight watchings, and expence of Palladian oyl." The Æneid is a little code of politics and religion. It describes men and manners and cities and countries. It embraces an outline of the arts of peace and of war. It

ⁿ Warton, Vol. I, Sect. 14.

^o Arcopagitica; a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicenced Printing.

travels through the whole circumference of CHAP.
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the universe; and brings together heaven =====
and hell, and all that is natural and all that is
divine, to aid the poet in the completion of
his design. It is at once historical and pro-
phetic. It comprises the sublime horrors of
a great city captured and in flames, and the
pathetic anguish of an ardent, disappointed
and abandoned love. It comprehends a cycle
of sciences and arts, as far as they could be
connected with the principal subject; and if
all other books were destroyed, the various
elements of many sciences and arts might be
drawn from an attentive perusal of this poem.

The plan of the *Æneid* in these respects,
is precisely what the plan of an epic poem
should be. The *Troilus* and *Creseide* can ad-
vance no pretensions to enter into this class
of composition. It is merely a love-tale. It
is not the labour of a man's life; but a poem
which, with some previous knowledge of
human sentiments and character, and a very
slight preparation of science, the writer might
perhaps be expected to complete in about as
many months, as the work is divided into

CHAP. XV. books. It is certainly much greater in extent of stanzas and pages, than the substratum and basis of the story can authorise.

Faults of
the Troi-
lus.

barren of
incidents.

It is also considerably barren of incident. There is not enough in it of matter generating visible images in the reader, and exciting his imagination with pictures of nature and life. There is not enough in it of vicissitudes of fortune, awakening curiosity and holding expectation in suspense.

defective in
its cata-
strophe.

Add to which, the catastrophe is unsatisfactory and offensive. The poet who would interest us with a love-tale, should soothe our minds with the fidelity and disinterestedness of the mutual attachment of the parties, and, if he presents us with a tragical conclusion, it should not be one which arises out of the total unworthiness of either. Creseide (as Mr. Urry, in his introduction to Henryson's epilogue to the Troilus, has very truly observed), however prepossessing may be the manner in which she appears in the early part of the poem, is "a false unconstant whore," and of a class which the mind of the reader almost demands to have exhibited, if

not as "terminating in extream misery," at least as filled with penitence and remorse. CHAP.
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Virgil indeed has drawn the catastrophe of his tale of Dido from the desertion of the lover. But the habits of European society teach us to apprehend less ugliness and loathsome deformity in the falshood of the lover, than of his mistress; and we repose with a tenderer and more powerful sympathy upon the abandoned and despairing state of the female. Besides, Virgil did not write a poem expressly upon the tale of Dido, but only employed it for an episode. The story of Romeo and Juliet is the most perfect model of a love-tale in the series of human invention. Dryden thoroughly felt this defect in the poem of Chaucer, and has therefore changed the catastrophe when he fitted the story for the stage, and represented the two lovers as faithful, but unfortunate.

But, when all these deductions have been made from the claims of the Troilus and Creseide upon our approbation, it will still remain a work interspersed with many beautiful passages, passages of exquisite tenderness, of

Its general
merits.

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great delicacy, and of a nice and refined observation of the workings of human sensibility. Nothing can be more beautiful, genuine, and unspoiled by the corrupt suggestions of a selfish spirit, than the sentiments of Chaucer's lovers. While conversing with them, we seem transported into ages of primeval innocence. Even Creseide is so good, so ingenuous and affectionate, that we feel ourselves as incapable as Troilus, of believing her false. Nor are the scenes of Chaucer's narrative, like the insipid tales of a pretended pastoral life, drawn with that vagueness of manner, and ignorance of the actual emotions of the heart, which, while we read them, we nauseate and despise. On the contrary, his personages always feel, and we confess the truth of their feelings; what passes in their minds, or falls from their tongues, has the clear and decisive character which proclaims it human, together with the vividness, subtleness and delicacy, which few authors in the most enlightened ages have been equally fortunate in seizing. Pandarus himself comes elevated and refined from the

pen of Chaucer: his occupation loses its grossness, in the disinterestedness of his motive, and the sincerity of his friendship. In a word, such is the *Troilus and Creseide*, that no competent judge can rise from its perusal, without a strong impression of the integrity and excellence of the author's disposition, and of the natural relish he entertained for whatever is honourable, beautiful and just.

There is a great difference between the merits of any work of human genius considered abstractedly, taken as it belongs to the general stock of literary production and tried severely on its intrinsic and unchangeable pretensions, and the merits of the same work considered in the place which it occupies in the scale and series of literary history, and compared with the productions of its author's predecessors and contemporaries. In the former case the question we have to ask is, Is it good? In the latter we have to enquire, Was it good? To both these questions, when applied to Chaucer's poem of *Troilus*

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Two ways
in which
a poem
may be
judged.

CHAP. and Creseide, the fair answer will be an af-
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 firmative.

Its merits in
 a compara-
 tive view.

But it is in the latter point of view that the work we are considering shows to infinitely the greatest advantage. The poem will appear to be little less than a miracle, when we combine our examination of it, with a recollection of the times and circumstances in which it was produced. When Chaucer wrote it, the English tongue had long remained in a languid and almost perishing state, overlaid and suffocated by the insolent disdain and remorseless tyranny of the Norman ravagers and dividers of our soil. Previously to the eleventh century it had no cultivation and refinement from the cowardly and superstitious Saxons, and during that century and the following one it appeared in danger of being absolutely extinguished. With Chaucer it seemed to spring like Minerva from the head of Jove, at once accoutered and complete. Mandeville, Wicliffe and Gower, whom we may style the other three evangelists of our tongue, though all

elder in birth than Chaucer, did not begin CHAP.
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so early to work upon the ore of their native language. He surprised his countrymen with a poem, eminently idiomatic, clear and perspicuous in its style, as well as rich and harmonious in its versification. His Court of Love, an earlier production, is not less excellent in both these respects. But it was too slight and short to awaken general attention. The Troilus and Creseide was of respectable magnitude, and forms an epoch in our literature.

Chaucer presented to the judgment of his countrymen a long poem, perfectly regular in its structure, and uninterrupted with episodes. It contained nothing but what was natural. Its author disdained to have recourse to what was bloated in sentiment, or romantic and miraculous in incident, for the purpose of fixing or keeping alive the attention. He presents real life and human sentiments, and suffers the reader to dwell upon and expand the operations of feeling and passion. Accordingly the love he describes is neither frantic, nor brutal, nor

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artificial, nor absurd. His hero conducts himself in all respects with the most perfect loyalty and honour; and his heroine, however she deserts her character in the sequel, is in the commencement modest, decorous, affectionate, and prepossessing. The loves of the Troilus and Creseide scarcely retain any traces of the preposterous and rude manners of the age in which they were delineated.

Its reputation.

This poem therefore, as might have been expected, long fixed upon itself the admiration of the English nation. Chaucer, by his Court of Love, and the ditties and songs which had preceded it, had gratified the partiality of his friends, and given *them* no mean or equivocal promise of what he should hereafter be able to perform. But these, we may easily conceive, were of little general notoriety. The Troilus and Creseide was probably, more than any of his other works, the basis of his fame, and the foundation of his fortune. He wrote nothing very eminently superior to this, till his Canterbury Tales, which were the production of his declining age. Owing perhaps to the confusion and

sanguinary spirit of the wars of York and Lancaster, English literature rather decayed CHAP.
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 than improved during the following century; and we had consequently no poem of magnitude, and of a compressed and continued plan, qualified to enter into competition with the *Troilus and Creseide*, from the earliest periods of our poetry to the appearance of the *Fairy Queen*. Accordingly, among many examples of its praises which might be produced, sir Philip Sidney in his *Defense of Poesy* has selected this performance, as the memorial of the talents of our poet, and the work in which he “undoubtedly did excellently well.”

There are some particular defects belonging to this production beside those already mentioned, which are the more entitled to our notice, as they are adapted to characterise the stage of refinement to which our literature was advanced in the fourteenth century. In the first place, the poem is interspersed with many base and vulgar lines, which are not only unworthy of the poet, but would be a deformity in any prose com- Trivial and
vulgar
lines.

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position, and would even dishonour and
debase the tone of familiar conversation. The
following specimens will afford a sufficient
illustration of this fact. Cupid is provoked
at the ease and lightness of heart of the hero,
and prepares to avenge himself of the con-
tempt.

—Sodainly he hitte him at the full,
And yet as proude a pecocke can he ^p pul.

B. I, ver. 210.

Thus wol she saine, and al the toun at ones,
The wretch is dead, the divel have his bones.
ver. 806.

Withouten jelousie, and soche debate,
Shall no husbonde saine unto me checke
mate.

B. II, ver. 754.

For him demeth men hote, that seeth him
^a swete.

ver. 1533.

^p strip of its plumage.

^a sweat.

Now loketh than, if thei be nat to blame,
 That hem ^ravaunt of women, and by name, CHAP.
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 That yet ^sbehight hem never this ne that,
 Ne knowen hem more than mine oldé hat.

B. III, ver. 321.

I am, til God me better mindé sende,
 At Dulcarnon, right at my wittés ende.
ver. 933.

For peril is with ^tdretching in ydrawe,
 Nay suche ^uabodés ben nat worthe an hawe.
ver. 856.

Soche arguments ne be nat worthe a bene.
ver. 1173.

But soche an ese therwith thei in her wrought,
 Right as a man is esed for to fele
 For ache of hedde, to clawen him on his hele.
B. IV, ver. 728.

I have herd saie eke, timés twisé twelve.
B. V, ver. 97.

There are also lines interspersed in the poem, which are not more degraded by the

Indecorums, and vicious sentiments.

^r vaunt, boast.

^s granted.

^t delay.

^u delays.

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meanness of the expression, than by the rudeness, not to say the brutality, of the sentiment. We may well be surprised, after considering the delicacy and decorum with which Chaucer has drawn his heroine, to find him polluting the portrait of her virgin character in the beginning of the poem with so low and pitiful a joke as this,

But whether that she children had or none,
I rede it nat, therefore I let it gone.

B. I, ver. 132.

The following sentiment must also be deeply disgusting to a just and well ordered mind. Calchas, the father of Creseide, languishes in the Grecian army for the restoration of his only child, and at length effects to his great joy the means of obtaining her in exchange for Antenor, a prisoner in the Grecian camp.

The whiché tale anon right as Creseide
Had herd, she (whiche that of her father
wrought,

w cared.

As in this case, right naught, ne whan he CHAP.
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deide)

Full busily, &c.

B. IV, ver. 668.

Another defect in this poem of Chaucer, Prolixity. of the same nature, and that is not less conspicuous, is the tediousness into which he continually runs, seemingly without the least apprehension that any one will construe this feature of his composition as a fault. He appears to have had no idea that his readers could possibly deem it too much to peruse any number of verses which he should think proper to pour out on any branch of his subject. To judge from the poem of Troilus and Creseide, we should be tempted to say, that compression, the strengthening a sentiment by brevity, and the adding to the weight and power of a work by cutting away from it all useless and cumbersome excrescences, was a means of attaining to excellence which never entered into our author's mind. A remarkable instance of this occurs in the fourth book, where upward of

CHAP.
XV. one hundred verses upon predestination are put into the mouth of Troilus, the materials of which are supposed to have been extracted from a treatise *De Causa Dei*, written by Thomas Bradwardine archbishop of Canterbury, a contemporary of our author. Other examples, scarcely less offensive to true taste, might be cited.

Compared
with the
Filostrato.

It is particularly deserving of notice that scarcely any one of the instances which might be produced under either of these heads of impropriety, has a parallel in the version made by Boccaccio of the same story, probably from the same author, and nearly at the same time. Few instances can be given in which the Italian writer has degenerated into any thing mean and vulgar, and he never suspends his narrative with idle and incoherent digressions. He seems to have been perfectly aware, that one of the methods to render a literary production commendable is to admit into it nothing which is altogether superfluous. The inference is, that, whatever may be the comparative de-

degrees of imagination and originality between CHAP.
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England and Italy in the fourteenth century, =====
what is commonly called taste had made a
much greater progress in the latter country
than among us.

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SEQUEL TO TROILUS AND CRESEIDE BY ROBERT
HENRYSON.—TRAGEDY OF SHAKESPEAR ON THE
SUBJECT.

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XVI.

Testament
of Cre-
seide.

MANY marks of approbation have been conferred upon the poem of Troilus and Creseide, beside the eulogium already quoted from sir Philip Sidney. Some of them are the following. A poet of a succeeding age, who now appears to have been Mr. Robert Henryson, wrote a sequel to the poem, or sixth book, which ordinarily bears the name of the Testament of Creseide. This is to be found in most of the editions of Chaucer; is printed by the earlier editors without any notice of distinction, as if it had been the work of Chaucer himself; and is so enumerated by Leland and other antiquaries. The sequel however contains in itself the

most explicit declaration that it is not the production of Chaucer; and Mr. Urry has annexed to it in his edition the following description of its source. “The Author of the Testament of Creseide, I have been informed by Sir James Eriskin, late Earl of Kelly, and diverse aged Scholars of the Scottish Nation, was one Mr. Robert Henderson, chief School-master of Dumferlin, near the end of the Reign of King Henry VIII.” There can be no reasonable doubt that this is the same person as “Mr. Robert Henryson of Dumferling^a,” enumerated among the Scottish poets, by William Dunbar, author of the Golden Terge, who died about the year 1530; and as “Maister Robert Henrisoun, Scolmaister of Dumferling,” and compiler of “The morall Fabillis of Esop^b,” a manuscript existing in the British Museum.

Henryson perceived what there was defective in the close of the story of Troilus

Plan of
Henry-
son.

^a Lament for the Loss of the Poets, in Ramsay's Evergreen, Vol. I, p. 129.

^b Percy, Vol. II, Book i, No. 13.

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Law of poetical justice examined.

and Creseide, as Chaucer has left it. It is true that the law of poetical justice, as it has been technically termed by some modern critics, has been urged to a ridiculous strictness, and that the uniform observation of this law is by no means necessary to the producing the noblest and most admirable effects. The scheme of real events, and the course of nature, so far as we are able to follow it, is conducted by no rule analogous to this of poetical justice; and the works of human imagination ought to be copies of what is to be found in the great volume of the universe. Poetry has a right to deal in select nature; but its selections should not be so fastidious as to exclude the most impressive scenes which nature has to boast. No true critic would wish Lear, Othello and the Orphan not to have existed, or scarcely to be in any respect other than as they are. Two of the three could not have been changed in their catastrophe, without the destruction of the main principles of their texture. But, though virtue may be shown unfortunate, vice should not be dismissed

triumphant. It is not perhaps necessary that CHAP.
XVI.
it should always be seen overtaken by some striking and terrible retribution; but it should not appear ultimately tranquil and self-satisfied; for such is not its fortune on the great stage of the world. It is followed in most instances by remorse; or, when it is not, remorse is only excluded by a certain hardness and brutality of temper, which is solitary in its character, and incompatible with genuine delight. Henryson therefore judged truly, when he regarded the poem of Chaucer as in this respect faulty and incomplete. The inconstant and unfeeling Creseide, as she appears in the last book of Chaucer, is the just object of aversion, and no reader can be satisfied that Troilus, the loyal and heroic lover, should suffer all the consequences of her crime, while she escapes with impunity.

The poem of Henryson has a degree of Story of the
poem.
merit calculated to make us regret that it is not a performance standing by itself, instead of thus serving merely as an appendage to the work of another. The author has conceived in a very poetical manner his descrip-

CHAP.
XVI.

tion of the season in which he supposes himself to have written this dolorous tragedy. The sun was in Aries ; his setting was ushered in with furious storms of hail ; the cold was biting and intense ; and the poet sat in a solitary little building which he calls his “^c orature.” The evening star had just risen.

^d Throughout the glasse her bemés brast so faire,

That I might se on every side me by ;

The northren winde hath purified the aire,

And shedde his misty cloudés fro the skie ;

The frost fresed, the blastés bitterly

Fro pole Artike come whisking loud and shill.

ver. 15.

Creseide is then represented as deserted of Diomed, filled with discontent, and venting her rage in bitter revilings against Venus and Cupid. Her ingratitude is resented by these deities, who call a council of the seven

^c oratory.

^d Through.

planets. The persons of the Gods bearing CHAP.
XVI.
the names of these planets are described with great spirit. Saturn, for example,

Whiche gave to Cupide litel reverence,
But as a boistous chorle in his manere
Came crabbedly with ^eaustern loke and chere.

His face ^ffrounsed, his ^glere was like the lede,
His tethe chattred, and shiver'd with the
chin,

His eien droup'd hole sonken in his hede,
With lippés blew, and chekés lene and thin.

.
^b Attour his belte his ⁱliart lockés laie,
^k Feltred unfaire, o'er fret with frostés hore,
His widdred wede fro him the winde out wore.

ver. 152.

In the council it is decreed that Creseide shall be punished with leprosy. Cynthia is deputed in a vision to inform her of her fate. She wakes and finds that her dream is true. She then intreats her father to conduct her,

^e austere. ^f wrinkled. ^g colour was like lead.
^b Down to. ⁱ white. ^k tangled.

CHAP.
XVI. unknown, to a hospital for lepers. By the governors of this hospital she is compelled to go as a beggar on the highway, with a bell and clapper, as we read was anciently practised by lepers. Among the passers by, comes Troilus, who in spite of the dreadful disfigurement of her person, finds something in her that he thinks he had seen before, and even draws from a glance of her horrible countenance a confused recollection of the sweet visage and amorous glances of his beloved Creseide. His instinct leads him no further : he does not suspect that his mistress is actually before him. Yet

For knightly pitie and memoriell
Of faire Creseide,

he takes “ a girdle, a purse of golde, and many a gaie jewell, and shakes them doun in the skirte” of the miserable beggar :

Than røde awaie, and nat a worde he spake.
ver. 103.

No sooner is he gone, than Creseide becomes aware that her benefactor is no other than

Troilus himself. Affected by this unexpected occurrence, she falls into a frenzy, betrays CHAP.
XVI.
her real name and condition, bequeaths to Troilus a ring which he had given her in dowry, and dies. Troilus laments her fate, and builds her monument.

It seemed to be the more proper that we should take thus much notice of the poem of the schoolmaster of Dumferling, that by contrasting Henryson and Chaucer, we might be the better able to judge of the vicissitudes of poetry and the progress of taste between the reigns of Edward III. and Henry VIII. The combat indeed is not exactly equal, since Chaucer possessed at least all the advantages of education which England could afford, if he were not yet a courtier, when he wrote his *Troilus and Creseide*, and Henryson was no more than a provincial schoolmaster. Accordingly the judicious reader will perceive that the Scottish, was incapable of rising to the refinements, or conceiving the delicacies of the English, poet: though it must be admitted that in the single instance of the state of mind, the half-recognition, half-ignorance,

Compari-
son of
Henryson
and
Chaucer.

CHAP.
XVI. attributed to Troilus in his last encounter with Creseide, there is a felicity of conception impossible to be surpassed. In some respects the younger poet has clearly the advantage over the more ancient. There is in his piece abundance of incident, of imagery and of painting, without tediousness, with scarcely one of those lagging, impertinent and unmeaning lines with which the production of Chaucer is so frequently degraded.

The principal circumstance however to be remarked respecting the poem of Henryson, is that, whatever eminence of merit may justly be ascribed to it, it does not belong to the Troilus and Creseide. Chaucer disowns the alliance of the Scottish poet. The great excellences of Chaucer's poem are its simplicity, its mild and human character, and that it does not sully the imagination of the reader with pictures of disgust and deformity. Highway-beggary, the bell and clapper, the leprosy, and the hideous loathsomeness of Henryson's Creseide, start away from, and refuse to be joined to, the magic sweetness and softness of Chaucer. No reader, who

has truly entered into the sentiment of kindness, sympathy and love subsisting between CHAP.
XVI.
Chaucer's personages, will consent that Creseide, however apostate, shall be overtaken by so savage and heart-appalling a retribution. This is not a species of chastisement that can be recognised in the court of the God whose battery is smiles, and whose hostility averted glances and lips of amorous resentment.

The poem of Troilus and Creseide was also translated into Latin rhymes by sir Francis Kinaston in the reign of Charles I, and accompanied with a commentary and notes. In one of the notes the translator has introduced an observation, that, if true, would overturn the hypothesis on which we have proceeded respecting the age at which Chaucer wrote this poem, and would even introduce a new incident into our knowledge of the events of the poet's life. He remarks that Chaucer has called the light which burned all night in the apartment of Creseide, by the appellation "morter;" and infers that "this word doth plainly intimate our author to have been

Troilus and
Creseide
translated
into Latin
by sir
Francis
Kinaston.

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an esquire of the body in ordinary to the king; as this is the name of the match-light which burns all night at the king's bed-side, which very few courtiers besides esquires of the body do understand what is meant by it¹." Every reader may judge for himself of the inference to be drawn from the paucity of persons initiated into this profound mystery; and of the "wit" of Chaucer (for such sir Francis Kinaston deems it) in calling this light by a name which none of his readers, except "esquires of the body in ordinary to the king," could understand.

Shake-
spear's
tragedy of
Troilus
and Cre-
seide.

It would be extremely unjust to quit the consideration of Chaucer's poem of *Troilus and Creseide*, without noticing the high honour it has received in having been made the foundation of one of the plays of Shakespear. There seems to have been in this respect a sort of conspiracy in the commentators upon

¹ Urry's Chaucer, Life, sig. f. Preface, sig. m. and Glossary, in voce Morter. The copy of Kinaston in the British Museum contains the text only, without notes. The notes, it should seem, were never printed.

Shakespear, against the glory of our old English bard. In what they have written concerning this play, they make a very slight mention of Chaucer; they have not consulted his poem for the purpose of illustrating this admirable drama; and they have agreed, as far as possible, to transfer to another author the honour of having supplied materials to the tragic artist. Dr. Johnson says, "Shakespeare has in his story followed, for the greater part, the old book of Caxton, which was then very popular; but the character of Thersites, of which it makes no mention, is a proof that this play was written after Chapman had published his version of Homer." Mr. Steevens asserts that "Shakspeare received the greatest part of his materials for the structure of this play from the *Troye Boke* of Lydgate." And Mr. Malone repeatedly treats the "History of the Destruction of Troy, translated by Caxton," as "Shakspeare's authority" in the composition of this drama.

These assertions however are far from being accurate. It would have been strange indeed if Shakespear, with a soul so poetical,

Reputation
of Chau-
cer in
the six-
teenth
century.

CHAP.
XVI.

Chaucer, and in so many respects congenial to that of Chaucer, had not been a diligent student of the works of his great predecessor. Chaucer made a much greater figure in the eyes of a reader of poetry in the sixteenth century, than it has been his fortune to do among the scholars of the eighteenth. After the death of Chaucer, the English nation experienced a long dearth of poetry, and it seemed as if the darkness introduced by the first destroyers of the Roman empire was about once more to cover our isle. Nothing worthy the name of poetry was the produce of the following century. English poets indeed existed of great reputation and merit, beside Chaucer, whose works might recommend themselves to the attention of Shakespear: Sackville, Marlow, Drayton, Donne, and Spenser. But all these were the contemporaries of Shakespear, men whom he might have seen, and with whom he had probably conversed. Chaucer was almost the only English poet in the juvenile days of Shakespear, upon whose reputation death had placed his seal; the only one whose laurels were consecrated

and rendered venerable by being seen through the mild and harmonising medium of a distant age. A further direct proof that Shakespear was familiarly conversant with the works of Chaucer may be derived from an examination of the early Poems of our great dramatic bard. His Rape of Lucrece is written precisely, and his Venus and Adonis nearly, in the versification and stanza used by Chaucer in the Troilus and Creseide and in many other of his works. Nor is it reasonable to doubt that the idea of the luscious paintings contained in these two pieces of Shakespear, was drawn from the too great fidelity and detail with which Chaucer has entered into similar situations in the poem before us. We have already seen a striking instance in which Shakespear has imitated a passage from the Troilus and Creseide, in his tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.

The fact is, that the play of Shakespear we are here considering has for its main foundation the poem of Chaucer, and is indebted for many accessory helps to the books mentioned by the commentators. The Troilus and

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XVI.

Tragedy of
Troilus
and Cres-
side prin-
cipally
founded
upon
Chaucer.

CHAP.
XVI. Creseide seems long to have been regarded by our ancestors in a manner somewhat similar to that in which the *Æneid* was viewed among the Romans, or the *Iliad* by the ancient Greeks. Every reader who advanced any pretensions to poetical taste, felt himself obliged to speak of it as the great classical regular English poem, which reflected the highest lustre upon our language. Shakespear therefore, as a man, felt it but a just compliment to the merits of the great father of our poetry, to introduce his characters in tangible form, and with all the advantages and allurements he could bestow upon them, before the eyes of his countrymen; and as a constructor of dramas, accustomed to consult their tastes and partialities, he conceived that he could not adopt a more promising plan, than to entertain them with a tale already familiar to their minds, which had been the associate and delight of their early years, which every man had himself praised, and had heard applauded by all the tasteful and the wise.

We are not however left to probability and

conjecture as to the use made by Shakespear CHAP.
XVI.
of the poem of Chaucer. His other sources
were Chapman's translation of Homer, the
Troy Book of Lydgate, and Caxton's His-
tory of the Destruction of Troy. It is well
known that there is no trace of the particular
story of Troilus and Creseide among the
ancients. It occurs indeed in Lydgate and
Caxton; but the name and actions of Pan-
darus, a very essential personage in the tale
as related by Shakespear and Chaucer, are
entirely wanting, except a single mention of
him by Lydgate^m, and that with an express
reference to Chaucer as his authority. Shake-
spear has taken the story of Chaucer with all
its imperfections and defects, and has copied
the series of its incidents with his customary
fidelity; an exactness seldom to be found in
any other dramatic writer.

Since then two of the greatest writers this
island has produced have treated the same
story, each in his own peculiar manner, it

Chaucer
and
Shake-
spear
compar-
ed.

^m Troye Boke, Book III, cap. xxv.

CHAP.
XVI. may be neither unentertaining nor uninstruc-
tive to consider the merit of their respective modes of composition as illustrated in the present example. It has already been sufficiently seen that Chaucer's poem includes many beauties, many genuine touches of nature, and many strokes of an exquisite pathos. It is on the whole however written in that style which has unfortunately been so long imposed upon the world as dignified, classical and chaste. It is naked of incidents, of ornament, of whatever should most awaken the imagination, astound the fancy, or hurry away the soul. It has the stately march of a Dutch burgomaster as he appears in a procession, or a French poet as he *shows himself* in his works. It reminds one too forcibly of a tragedy of Racine. Every thing partakes of the author, as if he thought he should be everlastingly disgraced by becoming natural, inartificial and alive. We travel through a work of this sort as we travel over some of the immense downs with which our island is interspersed. All is smooth, or undulates with so gentle and slow a variation as scarcely

to be adverted to by the sense. But all is CHAP.
XVI.
homogeneous and tiresome ; the mind sinks
into a state of aching torpidity ; and we feel
as if we should never get to the end of our
eternal journeyⁿ. What a contrast to a
journey among mountains and vallies, spotted
with herds of various kinds of cattle, inter-
sprersed with villages, opening ever and anon
to a view of the distant ocean, and refreshed
with rivulets and streams ; where if the eye
is ever fatigued, it is only with the boundless
flood of beauty which is incessantly pouring
upon it ! Such is the tragedy of Shakespear.

The historical play of Troilus and Cres-
sida exhibits as full a specimen of the different
styles in which this wonderful writer was
qualified to excel, as is to be found in any
of his works. A more poetical passage, if
poetry consists in sublime picturesque and
beautiful imagery, neither ancient nor mo-
dern times have produced, than the exhorta-

ⁿ These remarks apply to nine-tenths of the poem, though
by no means to those happier passages in which the author un-
folds the sentiments of his personages.

CHAP. tion addressed by Patroclus to Achilles, to
 XVI. persuade him to shake off his passion for
 Polyxena, the daughter of Priam, and reas-
 sume the terrors of his military greatness.

Sweet, rouse yourself; and the weak wanton
 Cupid

Shall from your neck unloose his amorous
 fold,

And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
 Be shook to air.

Act III, Scene 3.

Never did morality hold a language more
 profound, persuasive and irresistible, than in
 Shakespear's Ulysses, who in the same scene,
 and engaged in the same cause with Patroclus,
 thus expostulates with the champion of the
 Grecian forces.

For emulation hath a thousand sons,
 That one by one pursue. If you give way,
 Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
 Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,
 And leave you hindmost: there you lie,
 Like to a gallant horse fallen in first rank,
 For pavement to the abject rear, o'er-run
 And trampled on.

———O, let not virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was !
For beauty, wit, high birth, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating time.
One touch of nature makes the whole world
kin, . . .

That all with one consent praise new-born
gauds,

And give to dust, that is a little gilt,
More praise than they will give to gold o'er-
dusted.

Then marvel not, thou great and complete
man !

That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax.

———The cry went once on thee,
And still it might, and yet it may again,
If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive,
And case thy reputation in thy tent.

But the great beauty of this play, as it is
of all the genuine writings of Shakespear,
beyond all didactic morality, beyond all mere
flights of fancy, and beyond all sublime, a
beauty entirely his own, and in which no
writer ancient or modern can enter into com-
petition with him, is that his men are men;

CHAP.
XVI.

his sentiments are living, and his characters marked with those delicate, evanescent, undefinable touches, which identify them with the great delineations of nature. The speech of Ulysses just quoted, when taken by itself, is purely an exquisite specimen of didactic morality ; but when combined with the explanation given by Ulysses, before the entrance of Achilles, of the nature of his design, it becomes the attribute of a real man, and starts into life.—Achilles (says he)

——stands in the entrance of his tent.

Please it our general to pass strangely by him,
As if he were forgot ; and princes all,
Lay negligent and loose regard upon him :
I will come last : 'tis like, he'll question me,
Why such unplausible eyes are bent, why
turn'd on him :

If so, I have derision med'cinable,
To use between your strangeness and his
pride,
Which his own will shall have desire to drink.

When we compare the plausible and seemingly affectionate manner in which Ulysses

addresses himself to Achilles, with the key CHAP.
XVI. which he here furnishes to his meaning, and especially with the epithet "derision," we have a perfect elucidation of his character, and must allow that it is impossible to exhibit the crafty and smooth-tongued politician in a more exact or animated style. The advice given by Ulysses is in its nature sound and excellent, and in its form inoffensive and kind; the name therefore of "derision" which he gives to it, marks to a wonderful degree the cold and self-centred subtlety of his character.

The following is a most beautiful example of the genuine Shakespearian manner, such as I have been attempting to describe; where Cressida first proceeds so far as to confess to Troilus that she loves him.

CRESSIDA.

Boldness comes to me now, and brings me
heart:—

Prince Troilus, I have lov'd you night and
day,

For many weary months.

CHAP.
XVI.

TROILUS.

Why was my Cressid then so hard to win?

CRESSIDA.

Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
With the first glance that ever—Pardon me—
If I confess much, you will play the tyrant.
I love you now; but not, till now, so much
But I might master it:—in faith, I lie;
My thoughts were like unbridled children,
grown

Too headstrong for their mother:—See, we
fools!

Why have I blabb'd? Who shall be true to us,
When we are so unsecret to ourselves?—

But, though I lov'd you well, I woo'd you
not;—

And yet, good faith, I wish'd myself a man;
Or that we women had men's privilege
Of speaking first.—Sweet, bid me hold my
tongue;

For, in this rapture, I shall surely speak
The thing I shall repent.—See, see, your
silence,

Cunning in dumbness, from my weakness
draws

My very soul of counsel.—Stop my mouth.

Act III, Scene 2.

What charming ingenuousness, what exquisite *naïveté*, what ravishing confusion of CHAP.
XVI.
soul, are expressed in these words! We seem to perceive in them every fleeting thought as it rises in the mind of Cressida, at the same time that they delineate with equal skill all the beautiful timidity and innocent artifice which grace and consummate the feminine character. Other writers endeavour to conjure up before them their imaginary personages, and seek with violent effort to arrest and describe what their fancy presents to them: Shakespear alone (though not without many exceptions to this happiness) appears to have the whole train of his characters in voluntary attendance upon him, to listen to their effusions, and to commit to writing all the words, and the very words, they utter.

The whole catalogue of the *dramatis personæ* in the play of Troilus and Cressida, so far as they depend upon a rich and original vein of humour in the author, are drawn with a felicity which never was surpassed. The genius of Homer has been a topic of ad-

Homer and
Shake-
spear
com-
pared.

CHAP.
XVI.

miration to almost every generation of men since the period in which he wrote. But his characters will not bear the slightest comparison with the delineation of the same characters as they stand in Shakespear. This is a species of honour which ought by no means to be forgotten when we are making the eulogium of our immortal bard, a sort of illustration of his greatness which cannot fail to place it in a very conspicuous light. The dispositions of men perhaps had not been sufficiently unfolded in the very early period of intellectual refinement when Homer wrote; the rays of humour had not been dissected by the glass, or rendered perdurable by the pencil, of the poet. Homer's characters are drawn with a laudable portion of variety and consistency; but his Achilles, his Ajax and his Nestor are, each of them, rather a species than an individual, and can boast more of the propriety of abstraction, than of the vivacity of a moving scene of absolute life. The Achilles, the Ajax, and the various Grecian heroes of Shakespear on the other hand, are absolute men, deficient in nothing which can

tend to individualise them, and already touch-
 ed with the Promethean fire that might infuse
 a soul into what, without it, were lifeless
 form. From the rest perhaps the character
 of Thersites deserves to be selected (how
 cold and school-boy a sketch in Homer!) as
 exhibiting an appropriate vein of sarcastic
 humour amidst his cowardice, and a pro-
 foundness and truth in his mode of laying
 open the foibles of those about him, im-
 possible to be excelled.

Before we quit this branch of Shakespear's
 praise, it may not be unworthy of our atten-
 tion to advert to one of the methods by which
 he has attained this uncommon superiority.
 It has already been observed that one of the
 most formidable adversaries of true poetry, is
 an attribute which is generally miscalled dig-
 nity. Shakespear possessed, no man in higher
 perfection, the true dignity and loftiness of
 the poetical afflatus, which he has displayed
 in many of the finest passages of his works
 with miraculous success. But he knew that
 no man ever was, or ever can be, always
 dignified. He knew that those subtler traits

CHAP.
XVI.

Causes of
the excel-
lence of
Shake-
spear's
charac-
ters.

CHAP.
XVI.

of character which identify a man, are familiar and relaxed, pervaded with passion, and not played off with an eternal eye to decorum. In this respect the peculiarities of Shakespear's genius are no where more forcibly illustrated than in the play we are here considering. The champions of Greece and Troy, from the hour in which their names were first recorded, had always worn a certain formality of attire, and marched with a slow and measured step. No poet till this time, had ever ventured to force them out of the manner which their epic creator had given them. Shakespear first suppld their limbs, took from them the classic stiffness of their gait, and enriched them with an entire set of those attributes, which might render them completely beings of the same species with ourselves.

Particulars
in which
Chaucer
has the
superio-
rity over
Shake-
spear.

Yet, after every degree of homage has been paid to the glorious and awful superiorities of Shakespear, it would be unpardonable in us, on the present occasion, to forget one particular in which the play of Troilus and Cressida does not eclipse, but on the contrary.

falls far short of its great archetype, the poem ^{CHAP.}
of Chaucer. This too is a particular, in XVI.
which, as the times of Shakespear were much
more enlightened and refined than those of
Chaucer, the preponderance of excellence
might well be expected to be found in the
opposite scale. The fact however is unques-
tionable, that the characters of Chaucer are
much more respectable and lovable than
the correspondent personages in Shakespear.
In Chaucer Troilus is the pattern of an ho-
nourable lover, choosing rather every ex-
tremity and the loss of life, than to divulge,
whether in a direct or an indirect manner,
any thing which might compromise the re-
putation of his mistress, or lay open her
name as a topic for the comments of the
vulgar. Creseide, however (as Mr. Urry
has observed) she proves at last a "false un-
constant whore," yet in the commencement,
and for a considerable time, preserves those
ingenuous manners and that propriety of
conduct, which are the brightest ornaments
of the female character. Even Pandarus,

CHAP.
XVI. low and dishonourable as is the part he has to play, is in Chaucer merely a friendly and kind-hearted man, so easy in his temper that, rather than not contribute to the happiness of the man he loves, he is content to overlook the odious names and construction to which his proceedings are entitled. Not so in Shakespear: his Troilus shows no reluctance to render his amour a subject of notoriety to the whole city; his Cressida (for example in the scene with the Grecian chiefs^o, to all of whom she is a total stranger) assumes the manners of the most abandoned prostitute; and his Pandarus enters upon his vile occupation, *not from* any venial partiality to the desires of his friend, but from the direct and simple love of what is gross, impudent and profligate. For these reasons Shakespear's play, however enriched with a thousand various beauties, can scarcely boast of any strong claim

^o Act iv, Scene 5.

upon our interest or affections.—It may be CHAP.
XVI.
alleged indeed that Shakespear, having ex-
hibited pretty much at large the whole cata-
logue of Greek and Trojan heroes, had by
no means equal scope to interest us in the
story from which the play receives its name :
but this would scarcely be admitted as an
adequate apology before an impartial tribunal.

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